

Forest Oak School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104132
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	323973
Inspection date	2 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	106
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Hunt
Headteacher	Amanda Mordey
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Windward Way Birmingham B36 0UE
Telephone number	01217 170088
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Age group	4–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school provides for students with moderate learning difficulties. An increasing number of students have additional needs including social, emotional and behavioural problems, autistic spectrum disorders, and speech and language difficulties. These students form almost half of the school's population. The students are almost all White British in origin, although a very small number are from different ethnic backgrounds. Over half of the students are entitled to free school meals. The acting headteacher is also headteacher of Merstone special school, which is co-located with Forest Oak. The two schools are to become federated in the near future with a single governing body and a shared principal.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Forest Oak is a good school with some outstanding features. Standards have continued to improve since the previous inspection, particularly in terms of students' personal development; almost all the students achieve well and a few make outstanding progress. The pace of their learning accelerates as they progress through the school. This is a result of excellent work by the school staff in supporting students as they gradually learn to control their behaviour, and in helping them gain the self-confidence and motivation to do well in their learning.

The quality of teaching is good and continues to improve because of the commitment of teachers and the high quality of the monitoring and support provided by the senior team. The teachers ensure that their lessons are interesting and well paced. As a result, the students thoroughly enjoy their work and respond by trying their best. Teachers know their students well, but there is some inconsistency in the way the different teachers assess the small steps in students' progress. As a result, the targets which they set for students are not always focused sharply enough on each individual's learning needs. This sometimes slows down the pace of learning. The good curriculum provides students with practical experiences of working life which lead to a variety of challenging vocational qualifications. The curriculum for students aged 14 to 16 is outstanding because of the wide range of vocational options from which students can choose. This enables staff to tailor activities to the abilities and interests of individual students, which in turn has led to students gaining more qualifications in Year 11 and has helped to maintain the excellent levels of attendance in this part of the school. The school is currently working on extending this flexibility and 'personalisation' of the curriculum to other areas of the school. Students with additional learning difficulties are well supported and follow specifically adapted programmes where appropriate. The curriculum is enriched by educational visits which extend the students' social and cultural understanding.

The students make excellent progress in their personal development. This underpins their growing motivation to learn and their good achievement. The students thrive within the caring and supportive ethos of the school. Students with continuing behavioural problems or personal difficulties are very quickly identified and supported. The quality of this support is one of the school's strengths, and it has a significant impact on the students' emotional development and the continuing improvement in their behaviour. As a result of this support and guidance and the good programmes in personal, health and social education, the students learn to keep themselves safe and healthy. The good progress they make in acquiring and using basic skills, along with the school's successful programmes to ensure a smooth transition to college, prepares them very well for the next stage in their lives.

The students value their school. This is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and their good and improving rates of attendance. Parents are happy for their children to attend, knowing that they really enjoy their lessons and that the school has high expectations of their progress. One parent commented, 'Her education and learning have massively improved... she is now very happy and enthusiastic to go to school.' The acting headteacher has led the school outstandingly well in maintaining and improving its effectiveness during a period of change in the senior leadership, particularly in ensuring that staff work as a close-knit team and share a common vision. A dedicated management team gives her good support. The school has efficient systems to evaluate its work, and as a result, development planning has focused clearly on the right priorities for improvement. The governing body is supportive and keeps a close eye on the school's performance. Good improvement has occurred since the

previous inspection, and the effective procedures now embedded within the school mean that it has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

At the time of the inspection, no children were taught as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers consistently record the small steps in students' learning.
- Raise achievement further by using assessment procedures to set suitably precise learning targets which give clear guidance to teachers about how they can help students to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Because of their learning difficulties and, in many cases, their social and behavioural problems, students' attainment remains far below that which is expected in mainstream schools. However, most of the students, including those with more complex learning and behavioural needs, are making good progress and a few have done exceptionally well. All the students achieve well in learning basic skills and both primary and secondary students have consistently improved their attainment in reading, writing and oral communication. Students make good progress in meeting their individual learning targets, but because these are sometimes not precise enough, they do not always challenge the students to achieve their highest possible level of attainment. Students' progress in information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly improved since the previous inspection, to the extent that some students gain Entry Level qualifications in ICT by Year 9. A higher ability student in Year 11 has been successful in GCSE mathematics. All the Year 11 students in 2008 gained Entry Level and a range of vocational qualifications matched to their abilities and interests. The students make excellent progress in meeting challenging behavioural targets and this has a strong impact on their academic success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' excellent progress in their personal development reflects the school's exemplary and supportive management of behaviour. There are outstanding procedures to identify and support students who struggle to control their behaviour. The behaviour of every individual student is carefully tracked and this enables staff to provide intervention strategies which have proved extremely successful in helping students to manage their own behaviour. The school is calm because students feel safe and confident and know what teachers expect from them. Students were emphatic that bullying is rare and quickly dealt with. When students' behaviour becomes unacceptable, it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the student involved. All students are strongly encouraged to make their voices heard through class and school councils, the eco-committee and the inter-school student council, which includes students from the neighbouring special school and mainstream secondary school. This successfully helps students to understand their role in developing the cohesiveness of their local community. Students greatly appreciate the interest and trust which adults place in them. This has had a positive impact on their behaviour and progress. Because students thoroughly

enjoy school and are proud of their achievements, their attendance is good and continues to improve.

Through very good personal, health and social education programmes, the students gain an excellent knowledge of how to stay fit and healthy. Older students use their basic English, mathematics and ICT skills to develop a good knowledge of budgeting, writing job applications and interview techniques. Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding, as demonstrated, for instance, in their thoughtful and sensitive responses to an assembly about Candlemas which emphasised the theme of 'new beginnings'. Creative arts events such as India Week further develop the students' understanding of their own and wider communities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their students well and this enables them to plan interesting, well paced lessons which are well matched to the differing abilities of the students. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and discuss their perceptions with the teacher. There are inconsistencies, however, in the way different teachers record the small steps in progress which the students make. As a result, they are sometimes not confident to sharpen pupils' overall learning targets. The students like their teachers. They enjoy their lessons and try their best. They gain confidence to learn new things because they receive a high level of individual tuition from their teacher and the well-trained teaching assistants. This enables them to make good progress. The management of behaviour is excellent. Students understand and respond to clear routines.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broadly based and follows National Curriculum programmes through adapted schemes of work. Subject leaders monitor the curriculum closely to ensure programmes both interest the students and challenge them to learn new things. The school has good provision for teaching basic skills. Underpinning the curriculum are programmes which ensure students understand the value of living healthily and how to keep themselves and others safe. There are many and varied trips and visits, including a good range of residential experiences, so that students learn new things in different situations. The curriculum provided for students aged 14 to 16 is excellent because of its flexibility and because it can be tailored specifically to meet the needs and interests of each student. Teachers are working on procedures to extend this 'personalised' flexible curriculum throughout the school. The activities successfully motivate all the older students to continue their education in local colleges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides a very high standard of care for all of its students. Procedures to support the personal development of students are excellent and have a major impact on their good achievement and improvements in behaviour as they progress through the school. There are very well developed strategies, for instance to monitor and support the students' attendance, which have resulted in a significant decrease in rates of absence since the previous inspection. The students are proud of their successes and they like the way that staff discuss with them how well they are doing in their personal development and behaviour and how they can improve

even faster. This has a very positive impact on their progress. The students are aware of their achievements in each lesson because they evaluate their own progress in partnership with their teachers. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in their children's education. Students receive excellent advice and support as they are about to leave school. For example, every student has the opportunity during their last year at school to spend a block of time at a local college to prepare them for moving into further education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher and senior teachers have successfully steered the school through a period of change. The school has emerged with systems and procedures which have promoted improvements in students' progress and which show good promise for future development. These systems have been effectively linked to procedures for managing the performance of teachers and other staff. This has made a significant contribution to maintaining the consistency of teaching and, in turn, students' good achievement. The senior staff monitor the students' personal development and behavioural targets exceptionally well and leaders maintain a good overview of students' progress. For instance, the school's leaders are very effective in planning and monitoring the students' understanding of, and commitment to, community cohesiveness. The senior team are aware, however, of the inconsistencies in assessment methods and that teachers do not sometimes set clear enough targets for the students. Morale is high in the school and communication is excellent. Governors effectively monitor each aspect of the school's performance and provide strong support to the school's students and staff.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	IE ²
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	IE ²
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	IE ²
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	IE ²
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	IE ²
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	IE ²

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Forest Oak School, Birmingham, B36 0UE

Not long ago, my colleague and I came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and at school council. Thank you and well done!

We were only with you for one day. That was long enough for us to realise that you go to a good school. We could see that you all really enjoy school and that your behaviour has improved rapidly. These are the main strengths of the school.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in your behaviour and personal development.
- You benefit from a good range of activities, including excellent programmes to prepare you for when you go on to further education or training after you leave school.
- All the adults at the school have a real interest in your welfare and look after you very well.
- Lessons are interesting. This means you thoroughly enjoy learning and do your best.
- Your school is well run.

I think the school could improve further in two ways.

- Your teachers should make sure they all write down in the same way the small improvements you make in your work.
- They should use this information to help them to consistently give you a clear idea of what you need to do to improve your work.

You can help yourselves, too, by making sure your behaviour is always good, and continuing to try hard in lessons. Please thank your parents for the comments they made on the questionnaires, which showed how much they like the school and the way it helps you all to learn and behave well.

Yours sincerely

Mel Blackband

Lead inspector