

Mary Elliot School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104272
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	324007
Inspection date	3 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Graham Pirt

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	107
Sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Valerie Penny
Headteacher	Elizabeth Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2006
School address	Leamore Lane Walsall WS2 7NR
Telephone number	01922 490190
Fax number	01922 490199

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school has recently been re-organised to admit pupils from Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9) so that it now provides for secondary age pupils and students with severe learning difficulties, those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). There is a post-16 department. There are 36 pupils who have English as an additional language and eight pupils looked after by the local authority. It has very recently moved to a new building in a new locality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mary Elliot School is a good school. It is outstanding in the care and support it provides for pupils and they make outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being as a result. Pupils make good progress in their academic development. All of this means that pupils are very well prepared for their future lives. Pupils' good achievement is supported by good teaching and a curriculum well matched to their needs. It is enhanced by a very good range of activities which enrich the pupils' learning. The pupils enjoy themselves at school, greeting people with smiles and interest. They say that they feel safe and that they are very well supported and cared for by the staff. As one parent typically commented about her son, 'With the support, guidance and professionalism of the staff he is coming on beautifully.' Pupils understand and can talk about keeping healthy, choosing to eat sensibly and understanding the benefit of undertaking a range of physical activities. They behave very well in school and this is helped by the very good relationships they have with staff and with other pupils and the obvious pride they have in their new school and their own achievements. One parent said that their child 'has improved greatly in all areas' and that 'the teachers and assistants are doing a great job'. These views are echoed by many other parents.

Teachers and support staff understand pupils' learning difficulties very well. The systems for tracking pupils' progress identify pupils likely to be at risk of failure. However, staff do not have sufficient access to this progress data to allow them to set consistent targets for improvement. As a result, some targets for learning and guidance of pupils are not always accurate initially and have to be adjusted subsequently. The school staff work hard to assure themselves of pupils' levels when they enter school. However, because links with feeder and other schools are underdeveloped in agreeing assessment levels, staff do not have secure information about the range of pupils' needs and abilities when they first start. A wide range of opportunities enriches the curriculum. Pupils take part in sporting and outdoor pursuits as well as creative activities. These add to their enjoyment of school and have a significant impact on their self-confidence and social development. The school is developing good links with its new local community, making visits and undertaking valuable work in supporting charities.

The headteacher and other senior leaders demonstrate a clear vision and commitment to the pupils and staff in developing the school. They have managed the transition to a new building with an increased age range very well. They are supported by equally committed, hard-working staff. The governors have been closely involved in discussions about the re-organisation and demonstrate a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and where it needs developing. They challenge leaders well to improve provision. The school evaluates its own work well and has good capacity to continue this improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in their basic literacy, numeracy and life skills, particularly in their work-related learning. Teaching is good and the curriculum is matched well to students' needs, keeping them involved in their work and learning independence skills. As a result, students achieve a good range of accredited qualifications by the time they leave and are well prepared for the future. All students leaving post-16 gain accreditation with at least five modules from either ASDAN or OCR. Students make outstanding progress in their personal development because of the many opportunities to help them gain experiences of adult life through work

in college, industry, the community and through the varied physical activities. They undertake work experience in local facilities and, as a result, are aware of the importance of recycling and work-related skills, such as time keeping and teamwork. Students are supported by effective guidance from external agencies and their knowledge of the world of work is carefully adapted to their abilities. Students' behaviour is excellent because staff promote a mature and adult atmosphere which is well suited to students' needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop systems that are more accessible to staff to allow them to plan accurate targets initially.
- Compare pupils' work with feeder and other schools to ensure consistent levels in assessment when they first start.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well during their time in the school, although the nature of their difficulties is such that standards remain well below average. Pupils with particularly low starting points, whose success must be measured by smaller steps, make good progress in P levels, as shown through the assessment data and analysis of individual education plan targets. They develop greater levels of understanding and the ability to apply this knowledge in different situations. Pupils with ASD develop increasing independence skills, allowing them to achieve well in their work. The school's analysis of data shows that there is no difference in levels achievement of any groups by gender, ethnicity, those looked after by the local authority or those with English as an additional language. Key Stage 3 pupils display good progress in the one term they have been in the school. All pupils in Key Stage 4 gain accreditation in at least two modules of Transition Challenge as well as OCR in information and communication technology (ICT).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils have very good relationships with others and with staff. They enjoy school, feel safe and have positive attitudes to learning because they know they and their achievements are celebrated and valued. As a result, attendance is very high, despite the number of pupils with significant medical issues. One pupil said she liked coming to school 'because it has wonderful things' and another said that since coming to school he had made lots of friends. Pupils have a good understanding of the value of maintaining a healthy diet. As one pupil explained, 'It gives you energy so you can run.' They certainly apply this knowledge as they successfully participate in adventurous activities including sailing, outward bound and climbing. Well-planned activities and celebrations enhance pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and this, with the sharing of success and celebrating their own and others' achievements, contributes to their good spiritual development. Pupils know right from wrong and behave very well in the school. Their knowledge and experience of social aspects is enhanced by various community projects, working together to raise money for children in countries such as India, and for national charities. They participate enthusiastically in all curriculum opportunities and in the range of lunchtime clubs. Pupils value the school council, feeling they are listened to and appreciating that they also participate in their reviews.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils benefit from very strong teamwork between teachers and support staff and their good understanding of pupils' learning difficulties. This helps in the good organisation of the groups. There are very good relationships with pupils and this leads to them being fully engaged in their work. Staff know pupils well on a personal level and manage behaviour well. They encourage and celebrate effort and achievement with praise, ensuring that pupils try hard, showing high levels of enjoyment in their work and learning. An example of this was seen when pupils responded enthusiastically when deciding what was hidden in a basket during literacy work. Signing and symbols are often used, although occasionally opportunities are missed to develop pupils' skills further. There is good use of recording of pupils' achievements during lessons and by using digital images. In much of the teaching, activities are well matched to individual needs, keeping pupils suitably challenged. On occasions, initial targets lack precision, leading to them having to be reviewed more often.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is a broad and balanced curriculum which has been carefully modified so that it is well matched to the wide range of pupils' needs. Good work has been done on establishing an appropriate curriculum for Key Stage 3 pupils. It has not, as yet, developed to encompass the creative approaches seen in other areas of the school. Curriculum provision for pupils with ASD is very good, with a high level of structure. Provision for ICT makes full use of the very good resources. There is a good balance between personal skill and academic content. Opportunities are further enhanced by a good range of visits, providing real-life learning experiences and ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and beyond.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils' care, welfare and support are a central priority and are outstanding. There are rigorous systems in place to ensure the safeguarding of pupils, and the appointment of staff, for personal care, enables the school to provide very well for all pupils. The very good links with outside agencies, as well as appointment of their own staff, enables the school to ensure that pupils' medical, personal and therapeutic needs are met very well. Pupils feel safe and confident, reporting that there is no bullying and that staff listen to them if they have a problem. They say that they like the complementary therapies. One pupil said she liked the massage therapy as it helps her 'to relax'. Parents are very largely positive about the school and feel they are well informed about what is going on in all aspects of their children's learning and welfare. The school makes excellent efforts to maintain the high level of attendance and this has a very positive impact on pupils' achievement. Individual guidance for pupils is good on a day-to-day basis, although the tracking of progress, which is used well to help inform this, is not always easily accessible to all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's leaders and managers have effectively managed the recent changes to the age range and size of the school and its staff. This is enabling all pupils to sustain their good academic achievement and their outstanding personal development. The headteacher has a clear aspiration for rapid improvement in order to raise achievement further and ensures this is shared by all senior leaders. They have successfully identified what they need to do, providing a direction for the school. They have established a monitoring routine which has ensured that there is good teaching. The curriculum is monitored effectively and this contributes to school improvement while maintaining good standards. Staff have an ethos of using whole-school targets to identify progress and, through good self-evaluation, have an accurate understanding of the areas requiring improvement, including the improved use of tracking data and moderation of assessment when pupils enter the school. The school works well in developing community cohesion through the responsibilities given to pupils and the work it does in the local community, including recently organised partnership work with a local Asian women's group. Governors work closely with senior staff and have been active with the local authority throughout the re-organisation, working hard to develop and adapt provision to meet the changing remit of the school.

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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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

4 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Mary Elliot School, Walsall, WS2 7NR

Thank you very much for being so kind to us when we visited. We really enjoyed the chance to hear about everything you are doing. It was a pleasure to meet those able to come to school in such bad weather. We are sorry we couldn't meet you all. The most important thing to say is that you go to a good school.

Here are some of the good things we found about your school.

- You are very friendly and helpful, enjoy your work and are very good at coming to school regularly.
- You make good progress because you are taught well and you work hard.
- Everyone takes very good care of you so you are safe in school.
- You eat lots of healthy food and work very hard in your sports and in outdoor activities. Well done, keep it up!
- The staff make sure that you take part in visits and are well prepared for when you leave school.
- The headteacher and staff are working hard to make Mary Elliot School an even better place to be.

I have asked the school to do two things now to make it even better.

- Make sure that all staff keep track of how well you are doing and what you need to do next.
- Make sure staff work with people from your other schools to check that they all agree about the level at which you are working.

We are pleased that you enjoy attending such a caring, happy school and we hope you go on trying hard. We wish you all good luck in your future.

Yours sincerely

Graham Pirt Lead inspector