

Lakeside School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117680
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326662
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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 special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	58
Sixth form	13
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	Mr Andre Heymoz
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Chamberlain
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lemsford Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL8 6YN
Telephone number	01707327410
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, many of whom have complex needs. A third of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. An increasing number have autistic spectrum disorders and more pupils have severely challenging behaviour than at the time of the last inspection. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs and nearly all are from White British backgrounds. An above average percentage of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school makes provision for a small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It has gained a number of awards, including Active Mark, ICT (information and communication technology) Mark, Sports Mark and has Healthy Schools and Investor in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The senior leaders are right in their judgement that this is an outstanding school. Outstanding leadership and a very dedicated team of staff have enabled the school to sustain and build on the many strengths found at the last inspection. Parents are very satisfied with the school's work and describe it as 'fantastic', 'brilliant' and 'a place of excellence'.

Standards are necessarily very low as a result of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities. Nevertheless, achievement is outstanding and pupils make consistently good and in many cases excellent progress. They do particularly well in the EYFS and at post-16, where provision is excellent. Assessment and its use are major strengths of the school and this has a very positive effect on teaching and the curriculum. Within lessons and the curriculum as a whole, there is much exemplary practice in the way learning opportunities are matched to the needs of individual pupils. Outstanding teamwork between teachers, support staff and therapists ensures that the needs of pupils with the most complex difficulties are met.

The school has a warm, family ethos and pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Personal development is outstanding and pupils are very happy, secure and confident. They get on very well together and have excellent relationships with the staff. They have exceptionally good opportunities to find out about enterprise and the world of work, and become as independent as possible in preparation for adult life.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide outstanding direction to the school's work. Other staff in senior roles fulfil their responsibilities extremely well. Subject leadership is good. Subject leaders provide valuable advice and support to colleagues and they are developing their data analysis skills. However, they are not yet taking a full role in leading improvement in their subjects. Senior leaders have very high expectations and seek continuous improvement. This ensures that the school is exceptionally well placed to improve further. Assessment information is used extremely well in evaluating the school's effectiveness, in tracking pupils' progress and in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school's self-evaluation form is unduly detailed, however, mainly because senior staff do not systematically tease out and record the key points that emerge from the wealth of monitoring that takes place.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The Extended Education class is a particularly excellent feature within an outstanding school. The core curriculum focuses, rightly, on transition to adulthood. Teaching is outstanding and staff are enthusiastic and purposeful in the way they organise activities within and beyond the classroom. As a result, students' achievement is outstanding. Activities in school focus on the acquisition of basic skills, whilst practical activities outside the classroom and in the community enable those skills to be applied. A dynamic programme of activities, including accredited courses, college links courses, work-related learning and enterprise projects, is matched closely to the needs of different groups of students. Much emphasis is placed on preparing students for life after school. For example, educational journeys give them valuable experiences that help to develop their independence skills. Leadership is excellent and a range of plans is in place to extend the exciting opportunities even further. Long-term planning for individual students is a major strength and the school works exceptionally well with other agencies, providers and parents to ensure the best possible placement for each student on leaving school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Outstanding provision in the EYFS gives rise to exceptionally happy children who quickly settle and show a high level of engagement with activities. They are very responsive, readily focus and frequently smile because activities are matched exceptionally well to their personal and learning needs. The staff are highly skilled in promoting children's social and communication skills and their achievement is particularly outstanding in these areas. Children also make very good progress in developing their independence. Care, support, teaching and teamwork between the staff are all outstanding. National guidance has been adapted skilfully to meet the needs of the children and lessons are planned exceptionally well. Partnership with parents is good; establishing a two-way flow of information between parents and other providers with the school is developing. The teacher who leads the EYFS provides outstanding leadership and has established a warm, loving and purposeful environment that ensures children get off to an excellent start.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop subject leadership to enable leaders to enhance further their curriculum areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Throughout the school, progress is consistently at least good and frequently outstanding. There are no significant differences between the achievement of pupils from different backgrounds or between girls and boys. Pupils make very good progress towards challenging targets in their individual education plans. At the time of the last inspection, pupils did less well in science than in other subjects because of staffing difficulties. These have now been resolved. Progress is now at least good and often outstanding in English, mathematics, science, personal, social and health education and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils meet with a very good level of success in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the Youth Award at post-16. Students with severe learning difficulties gain ASDAN silver or bronze awards and Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) units. Those with profound and multiple learning difficulties gain AQA Units and some ASDAN Towards Independence modules. When they leave, all students go on to college or to other placements that have been chosen very carefully to meet their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The excellent progress pupils make in their personal development underpins their outstanding achievement. Pupils of all ages are very enthusiastic about the school and gain great enjoyment from the activities provided. Pupils say that the best word to describe the school is 'super', and they are highly responsive to the efforts staff go to in meeting their needs. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent because of the warm and positive atmosphere in the school and the value placed on pupils as individuals. Attendance is outstanding and behaviour is exceptionally good. Pupils with severely challenging behaviour have made distinct improvements since joining the school. Communal occasions such as lunchtimes and assemblies are calm and orderly. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and they enjoy very trusting

relationships with the adults who care for them. Pupils can talk sensibly about healthy foods, know which foods to combine to make a healthy lunch and readily take part in a wide range of physical activities. The school council makes an active contribution to the life of the school and charitable and community projects are undertaken regularly. Pupils gain a wide range of skills and are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers' expectations are high, and they have very good subject knowledge as well as a thorough understanding of pupils' needs. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and are very skilled in engaging them as active and enthusiastic learners. They make very good use of pictures, symbols, objects, signing, switches and other aids to make learning accessible to all pupils. They plan their lessons exceptionally well and tailor work and resources precisely to individual needs. The 'learning to learn' project has provided pupils with some very good opportunities to identify what makes an effective learner. Teachers and teaching assistants achieve a very good balance between challenge and support so that pupils concentrate very well and try hard. Assessment is outstanding. Senior staff have been gathering and analysing a wealth of data for many years. Teachers use assessment information exceptionally well in planning their lessons, recording and tracking pupils' progress and setting precise individual education plan and subject targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is matched exceptionally well to the needs and interests of individuals as well as groups of pupils, with an underlying theme of 'learning for life'. Through an emphasis on sensory experiences, the curriculum is highly effective in meeting the needs of pupils with profound, multiple and complex needs. It has also been adapted very well to meet the social and communication needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Despite their extreme learning difficulties, both groups of pupils are fully included and spend most of their time learning alongside their classmates who have severe learning difficulties. Opportunities to learn about enterprise are outstanding and a very good range of accredited courses is offered at Key Stage 4 and at post-16. The school provides an extensive programme of enrichment activities and involvement in the School Sports Partnership provides excellent opportunities for pupils to work and socialise with their mainstream peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The commitment of the staff ensures that pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Individual support programmes are planned very carefully and collaboration with a range of other agencies is exceptionally good. A large team of therapists and a wealth of special facilities and resources enable the school to provide detailed support programmes tailored to the needs of individual pupils. Arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of children are extremely rigorous and the school goes to great lengths to monitor and support vulnerable children. It has responded very well to the increased number of pupils with severely challenging behaviour and deals flexibly and effectively with the needs of each pupil. Careers guidance and transition

arrangements are exemplary. Pupils receive regular verbal feedback so that they are clear about how well they are doing. Staff use a combination of symbols and pictures to involve pupils in evaluating their own progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The complementary skills of the headteacher and deputy ensure that the school is a dynamic establishment with a strong commitment to improvement. The delegation of responsibilities amongst senior staff and teamwork throughout the school are key strengths. The headteacher and deputy provide outstanding leadership for the curriculum and assessment. The leadership and management of provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and those in the EYFS and at post-16 are also outstanding. Senior staff regularly monitor teaching and undertake a wealth of other monitoring. In addition, there are examples of very good involvement of other staff in evaluating the school's effectiveness. For instance, each class has an autism link person and this team meets regularly to discuss the quality of provision. All the staff readily embrace initiatives that are likely to be of benefit to the pupils and have worked to achieve a range of quality marks.

Professional development is excellent. Several staff provide training to other schools within and beyond the county, and the headteacher advises new heads and contributes to local authority reviews of policy. The induction of new staff is exemplary: different information packs have been developed to support the full range of jobs within the school, backed up by extensive training. Staffing is a major strength and classrooms are very well resourced, including with ICT. The school makes exceptionally good use of its restricted premises, adapting the accommodation to meet the changing needs of the pupils. Governance is good. Governors provide very good support to the school and are closely involved in planning future developments; they are developing their role in challenging senior leaders. Community cohesion is also good and developing. The school is already highly effective in ensuring that all pupils are valued as members of its own community, and pupils have regular opportunities to participate in and contribute to the local community and to fundraising. The school has just begun to explore possible international links to extend pupils' global awareness. Outstanding links with other schools, especially with a neighbouring primary and secondary school, provide an increasing range of opportunities for pupils to work alongside their mainstream peers.

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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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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?	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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**

13 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lakeside School, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6YN

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we came to visit your school and thank you especially to those of you who told us what it is like to be a pupil at Lakeside. We enjoyed our visit very much and now I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school.

It is an outstanding school and we know that you and your parents are very pleased with it too. The school has many strengths so these are just some of the most important ones:

- you are making extremely good progress with your learning
- you really enjoy school and it was lovely to see how happy and confident you are
- the teachers make sure that the work is exactly right for you, not too difficult and not too easy
- they understand your difficulties and do everything they can to help you;
- you get on very well with each other and have excellent relationships with your teachers and teaching assistants
- the school has some wonderful resources and the 'magic carpet' is fantastic.

The headteacher and the other staff are already doing an outstanding job and they are always thinking of ways to make the school even better for you. We have asked them to:

- make some changes to the way subjects are led and think even more carefully about what is already working very well and what could be improved.

I hope you go on enjoying your time at Lakeside and keep doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector