

Pond Meadow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125467
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	328336
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	72
Sixth form	9
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	Mrs Margaret Taylor
Headteacher	Mr David Monk
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Pond Meadow Larch Avenue Belfields Guildford GU1 1DR
Telephone number	01483 532239

Age group	2–19
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2009
Inspection number	328336

Fax number

01483 537049

Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pond Meadow is a community special school for children and pupils aged 2-19 years with a wide range of learning disabilities, all of whom have statements of special educational need related to severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or autistic spectrum. Some have a combination of these needs with additional physical and medical needs. In the Early Years Foundation Stage a small number of children are undergoing assessment prior to potentially receiving a statement. The school has recently seen its proportion of pupils with autism increase and the number is now significant in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. The ethnicity of the school roll is largely White British, although other minority ethnic groups are present. Boys outnumber girls by approximately 2 to 1. The school has very recently moved into new accommodation. It works in partnership within local federations of other schools. The school has received the Healthy School Award and has Investors 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

Pond Meadow is an outstanding school. The pupils make excellent progress in their learning and personal development. Inevitably, due to their learning difficulties, the standards reached by pupils are exceptionally low, but they achieve outstanding success in relation to their starting points.

The quality of teaching is outstanding with several exemplary features. These include high-quality planning based on comprehensive assessments made by teachers and teaching assistants. They are supported by colleagues who have recognised expertise in several areas including the Early Years Foundation Stage, communication and behaviour management. These skills are used to good effect to the benefit of pupils in lessons. All staff are fluent in using a wide range of communication methods.

The vast majority of pupils meet their challenging targets in their individual education plans. Where they do not, the school carries out a review of individual progress and promptly acts to provide appropriate support. The pupils enjoy coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe and well cared for. The pupils' attendance is good. Absences are invariably for medical reasons: their behaviour is outstanding.

The school's monitoring of pupils' overall achievement is very good and leads to appropriate experiences. The curriculum is good and the use of sensory experiences is a particular strength. It is enriched by access to the community and structured lunchtime activities geared to maximise personal development, particularly independence at meal times. Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development due to the well-integrated provision of PSHCE (personal, social, health and citizenship education) and high-quality support and guidance. The pupils enthusiastically take up responsibilities when provided and express choices when offered. Membership of the school council is taken seriously. Opportunities for wider accreditation and work-related learning are missed for some more-able older pupils.

The overall quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils and parents is excellent. School procedures, including child protection, ensure pupils' well-being is appropriately safeguarded. Parents are assisted in helping their children at home by regular communication and events such as 'family learning' where they gain specific advice and access to relevant resources. Pupils receive a wide range of therapies to improve their access to the curriculum and overall independence. Lunchtimes and snack-times are well used to support pupils' autonomy. Respect for the pupils' wishes and dignity in their personal care are strong features of daily life at school. However, transport arrangements for a small minority of learners mean they spend too long in vehicles at the start of the day.

The quality of leadership and management are outstanding. There is a clear strategic vision for the school's future development in its excellent accommodation. The transition has been well managed, although not all facilities are yet in use. All staff reflect on their practice and they have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. The school has consolidated its strengths, notably in enabling all staff to be highly skilled in meeting the needs of learners. Its capacity for further improvement is also outstanding. The school is well supported by the governing body.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good quality of education. The students' achievements are good, as shown by the awards they gain within the National Skills Profile. The curriculum is good due to its focus on use of the community and the development of basic skills. Attendance at local colleges of further education and other schools has not yet been secured since the very recent move to new premises. Although the current awards are relevant, the range of awards is too narrow and does not truly reflect the range of ability within the sixth form. As a result of the good teaching they receive and the excellent care, guidance and support, the students' personal development is outstanding. Their contributions are highly valued by the local community where they undertake a range of work-related experiences. Leadership and management are good. Roles have recently been reorganised following staff changes. Nevertheless, the sixth form is supported by the school's senior leadership team to good effect.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and gives the children a firm foundation for learning. The specialist assessment provision within the department for those on the autistic spectrum has a highly positive impact on all aspects of its work. Staff plan, monitor and reflect in great detail so that the children's progress is charted accurately. This high-quality assessment enables the staff to provide highly relevant experiences that enable the children to make outstanding progress towards achieving their learning goals. In light of their special educational needs, a strong emphasis is placed upon the children's communication skills. Success in this respect enables them to access all other aspects of their learning. Regular opportunities for activity, both indoors and outside, ensure physical development is given a suitably high priority. The staff team works very well together and is led by example. The staff have well-developed collaborative links with other agencies, including the local children's centre and Portage service. The expertise within the department is also used for the benefit of other local institutions. These external links and those with parents ensure that the welfare of the children is excellent. Parents hold very positive views about the department. They appreciate the regular contact and programmes of family learning, including the 'Hanen' programme designed to help them understand the needs of their children and so work in partnership with the school staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for accreditation and work-related learning in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Ensure the transport arrangements for all learners gives them a good start to the day.
- Make full use of all its new specialist facilities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The range of ability within the main school is exceptionally wide-ranging, although it remains within pre-National Curriculum levels (p-levels). The overall attainment of learners is exceptionally low due to their special educational needs. Nevertheless, in relation to their starting points, the pupils' achievements are outstanding, irrespective of their gender or ethnic

origin. Pupils make excellent progress in meeting challenging targets in their individual education plans.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils respond very well to the school's efforts to keep them active and healthy. The staff team successfully provide a safe and secure learning environment where the pupils thrive. Their good attendance and excellent behaviour support this judgement, and parents agree. On arrival, the pupils are clearly pleased to be there. Some have to wait patiently to enter the school following their sometimes lengthy journeys to school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their development are outstanding, especially in their growing awareness of themselves and other cultures. Many work well in pairs and teams, which helps them prepare for the next stage of their education. Some pupils show a good awareness of their peers and offer unprompted support. They respond well to the many options given to them by staff, where they can state preferences for activities and meals. There are many opportunities for the pupils to express their views and the school council gives good experience of formally requesting improvements. They make a good contribution to the school by helping with jobs around the school. Fund-raising for several national charities enables them to develop an understanding of needs beyond their own. Their presence in the local community and hosting mainstream peers on work experience adds significantly to community cohesion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers have consistently high expectations of themselves and the pupils. Daily meetings between teachers and teaching assistants help to maintain a clear focus on each pupil's progress. The staff have a good knowledge of their subjects and each pupil's preferred learning style, likes and dislikes and how these may affect their attitudes to peers, adults and learning. This ensures that the learning environment is happy yet purposeful and gives the pupils security and confidence to learn. All teachers and teaching assistants are extremely well skilled in using a wide range of communication methods that include picture exchange, symbols and signing. Typically, lessons are activity based and the use of sensory experiences is particularly effective. For example, to promote literacy teachers bring 'sensory stories' to life by providing ice for pupils to hold or using puppets to act out speaking parts. The pupils' responses, sometimes by using switches, are monitored closely so that none feel threatened nor their wishes disregarded. Staff are experienced in managing challenging behaviour so that disruptions are minimised and time for learning is maximised. When appropriate, teachers use plenary sessions at the end of lessons to encourage pupils to reflect upon how much they have learned. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to work in pairs and small groups. This successfully promotes their abilities to work with others and assists their personal development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The morning sessions have an appropriately strong focus on literacy and numeracy. In most classes the pupils are grouped by age, thereby integrating pupils with the most profound needs with more-able pupils. This is successful due to carefully planned programmes and skilled use

of appropriate methods by staff. The sensory curriculum places an emphasis on enabling the pupils to learn through all their senses, for example experiencing different textures and smells alongside re-enforcement of recognising specific objects of reference or symbols. Initiatives such as 'intensive interaction' also promote the pupils' communication skills well. Where necessary, pupils become aware of their programmes through visual timetables, so they understand what is expected in the next activity. The afternoon lessons are planned around themes across the curriculum yet still retain a strong focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The science curriculum is currently limited as the new facilities are not yet in use. The provision for PSHCE is outstanding and aids the pupils' personal development and well-being significantly. So, too, do extended themes such as 'Feeling Good' week, which offers many activities that also help develop the pupils' emotional well-being. Activities during lunchtime enrich the curriculum, as does the annual county special schools' ski-trip. Appropriate use is made of the local community, including sports facilities, to enable pupils to develop confidence in different settings. However, work-related learning and accreditation opportunities for some more-able pupils in Key Stage 4 are missed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils and families. The school's 'team around the child' is made up of relevant agencies, to provide comprehensive planning that maximises access to learning and equality of opportunity. Therapists and medical staff integrate their support most effectively.

Links with parents are extremely good and the overwhelming majority give wholehearted support to the school's work. Many made positive comments about the care and support provided by the staff by for their families. Comments included, 'It's a brilliant school...there is a 'can do' attitude...my child hates the holidays and can't wait to get back.' Still supportive, some parents suggested they would like a breakfast club, more after school activities and increased therapies. Conversations with the school's management confirm that these issues are being actively considered and parents will be consulted further. Those pupils with challenging behaviour are well managed due to carefully crafted plans and consistent implementation. Arrangements for safeguarding learners take full account of the most recent legislation. Annual reviews and written academic reports, including those for looked after children, are of high quality. Parents' views are taken into account and acted upon where possible. Professional observations and data are used to monitor progress and provide suitable interventions when necessary. Staff use detailed guidance in relation to the care for learner's personal care needs, which are always addressed with respect and dignity. Support for individualised feeding programmes and other issues is very good.

School transport to and from school, organised by the local authority, generally works well despite the sometimes long journeys made by learners. However, occasionally these arrangements are unsatisfactory and result in some learners having to remain in vehicles on the school site for up to half an hour before school begins. This is not a good start to the day and is in sharp contrast to all other arrangements. The school needs to take steps to provide additional care and support in these circumstances.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher and his leadership team give a clear sense of direction for the school's future development. The school looks at its own practice in great detail and surveys widely to gain an accurate view of its own effectiveness. The school's commitment to equality of opportunity and community cohesion is evident in its inclusion programme and partnerships with other schools that are highly valued and mutually beneficial.

The work to ensure a smooth transition to the new site has been largely successful and the learners have settled in well. The school is making good progress in utilising its excellent new accommodation. Understandably, displays of learners' achievement are at an early stage and the school has yet to fully commission the specialist science facilities or hydrotherapy pool. The school's development planning addresses appropriate areas, all designed to improve its provision.

The school's commitment to developing its staff to meet the needs of learners is exemplary. For example, the programme of professional development for all staff, and particularly teaching assistants who achieve NVQ level 3 qualifications, has a significant effect on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. The school has a good track record of in-house training that enables teaching assistants to become fully qualified teachers in this specialist field. Fittingly, it has Investors in People status.

Leadership across the school is distributed very well and this helps to drive forward improvement. The experienced governing body makes a good contribution to premises, finance and personnel and rightly seeks to improve its monitoring role of the curriculum and learners' progress. The school's finances are well managed and appropriately audited.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

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	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	2	
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	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?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	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

16 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pond Meadow School, Guildford, GU1 1DR

I was so pleased to see how well you all do at school and thank you so much for the warm welcome! I can tell you that you go to an outstanding school and it is clear that you enjoy your lessons. All the staff work very hard to help you learn. The quality of teaching is outstanding and this helps you to become as independent as possible. Your behaviour is outstanding and your attendance is good. I can see how much you like your new school. You make outstanding progress in letting other people know how you feel and also in looking after yourselves. I can see why, because of the lessons and support you receive. Like you, I really enjoyed the stories you had and some of you really do dance well! You have excellent relationships with the staff and each other. The school also helps your parents and carers so that they can help you at home too.

I am asking your headteacher to do a few things to help the school be even better for you. One is to offer more awards and chances for work experiences for some of you. The school also needs to see that none of you are kept waiting outside school for too long at the start of the day. And finally, all your new rooms need to be fully used so that you can make best use of your fantastic new building.

I wish you lots of luck in your new school!

Yours faithfully

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector