

Walton Leigh School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125468
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	328337
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	61
Sixth form	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Gill Golding
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Curtis
Date of previous school inspection	19 June 2006
School address	Queen's Road Hersham Walton-on-Thames KT12 5AB
Telephone number	01932 223243
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Walton Leigh is a special school for students who have severe learning difficulties and those who have profound multiple learning difficulties. A significant minority have additional autistic spectrum disorders. The school gained specialist school status in September 2008 for Cognition and Learning. All students have a statement of special educational needs. The number of students eligible for a free school meal is close to the national average. A small number of students speak English as an additional language and there are a few looked after children. The school holds a number of awards including Healthy School, Sportsmark and the Parent Partnership award. It also holds the Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Walton Leigh is an outstanding school. Students' achievements are excellent because of very high-quality teaching. Exemplary care, guidance and support mean their personal development is outstanding. This ensures that across all aspects of school life, students make excellent progress in both their personal and academic development. The school is highly successful in its vision to foster 'a culture of learning in which everyone is valued and supported to develop his or her potential and prepare for adult life'. Students work, play and socialise together very happily in a secure and harmonious environment. All parents speak very highly of the school and comments such as, 'I believe that Walton Leigh is an excellent school which shows through in the dedication and hard work of staff', are a measure of the high esteem in which it is held.

The school's expertise in working with students with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties has been recognised by specialist school status. It uses this extremely well, not just for its own students, but also to champion and promote the status of students with similar learning difficulties in a local, national and international context. This work is very carefully monitored and, having implemented local, regional and national initiatives, the school is now beginning to activate the links it has made with schools in Hong Kong and Australia. Through these and similar activities, the school makes a very effective contribution to community cohesion.

Students with a very wide range of abilities make outstanding progress because of outstanding teaching. The school has particular strengths in teaching communication and the excellent pace of learning in this area ensures that all students make outstanding gains in developing their skills. Some excellent teaching of communication was seen in a Year 10 numeracy lesson, where staff used a very wide range of specialist techniques, such as signing and pictorial systems. This practice is totally consistent in all lessons and is one of the foundations of the school's success. In all subjects, staff plan conscientiously; they are enthusiastic and make learning fun. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively as a team, even though many are new to teaching. They ensure that all students achieve the appropriate small-step, learning targets that are set for them. All staff have excellent relationships with students and give them detailed feedback that helps them to improve their work.

Provision for students' personal development is a cornerstone of the school's ethos and is excellent for all age groups. All aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are exemplary. In the reflection sessions held at the end of each day, students showed a high degree of reverence and respect towards others and very effectively reviewed and celebrated their efforts during the day. Students say that they feel safe and thoroughly enjoy their learning. Through the school council, students are closely involved in helping to contribute towards the school community. A good example of this is the contribution they have made to the development of the outside play area. Behaviour is excellent, based on the consistent use of the behaviour policy by all staff. Students gain a keen appreciation of issues in the wider world through lessons and out-of-school activities. Even though many have limited oral communication skills, all are very willing to express their views on a range of issues. Their confidence and self-esteem are a pleasure to behold. Particularly impressive was the way in which students of all ages used information and communication technology (ICT) to present their views at annual reviews. Those who are leaving made very high-quality DVDs of their life in school which are highly valued by the students themselves, their parents and employers. Students develop an excellent understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle through the very wide opportunities

for physical development and the choices that they make at lunchtime. This is reflected in the award of Healthy School Status and the Sportsmark. In all their activities, students pay particular regard to the importance of being safety-conscious. The school makes every effort to promote good attendance so that it is now excellent. The very high emphasis that the school places on students making choices about all aspects of their life in school ensures that a very high proportion are able to act independently and make a success of their lives after school.

The curriculum is very carefully tailored to the range and complexity of students' needs with a wide range of therapies provided. The strong emphasis on personal and social education and language, literacy and numeracy underpins all of the school's work and has a significant impact on students' achievements in all areas. The wide range of enrichment activities, such as visits to the theatre, museums, the local sports centres and a farm, all add to students' enjoyment of school.

The care, guidance and support students receive for their personal and academic development is excellent. There are thorough safety procedures in place and risk assessments fully meet requirements. Staff make sure that all students, whatever their needs, settle quickly and happily into school life. There is comprehensive tracking of students' academic progress that very effectively guides students' learning. Parents are partners in their child's education and the school works exceptionally well with them, which is recognised by the achievement of Partnership with Parents Award. The school also works extremely closely with a wide range of outside agencies, to support students' development.

Leadership is excellent. The headteacher leads by example and provides the commitment, drive and determination to ensure that all students reach their potential. Along with the deputy headteacher, she gives a very clear sense of direction. Together they have set a very strong climate of teamwork among all adults so that everyone makes an active contribution to school improvement. At present, the roles and responsibilities of middle managers do not fully reflect the initiatives the school is pursuing through its specialist school status. The school recognises this and has drawn up an action plan to address the issue. A very significant feature in the success of the school is the use of 'research groups' drawn from staff, governors and sometimes parents when appropriate, to plan and develop initiatives. The governing body is highly active in promoting the school and its aims. It has worked tirelessly to ensure that the quality of provision is such that the school is recognised as a leader in the local, regional and national communities which work with students with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and, largely because of the rigorous and discerning monitoring of the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, everyone is very clear about what needs to be done for the school to improve further. Staff development and training are given a high profile and staff approach key developments very enthusiastically. The track record of improvement since the last inspection and the successful bid for specialist school status show that Walton Leigh has excellent capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students in the further education (FE) classes achieve exceptionally well as a result of excellent teaching and learning. The curriculum and accreditation arrangements are very well matched to the needs of students so that all are extremely well prepared for life after school. This was clearly seen in a session in which students discussed the issues of sex education and the emphasis the school places on ensuring that all have keen awareness of the dangers of substance abuse. A particularly strong feature of the provision is the way in which the FE students help younger

students. Through work experience in the community, for example by working in local cafes, students develop skills that will stand them in good stead for the future. At the same time, such opportunities make learning fun. The sixth form is very well managed, with excellent support from the headteacher and senior leadership group.

What the school should do to improve further

- Finalise the restructuring of the role and responsibilities of middle managers to more closely reflect the initiatives the school is pursuing through its specialist status.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In all areas of the school, students make excellent progress and achieve extremely well. The school has rigorous and robust systems to track students' progress across the school. These are used extremely well to show the small but critical steps in students' learning and ensure that activities are very carefully matched to the needs of individuals. Excellent examples of this were seen in a Key Stage 3 literacy lesson involving students with no verbal communication skills, and in a sixth form dance session. The rigorous and challenging targets that are set for all students, relating to both their personal and academic development, provide the school with a very effective basis for continued improvement. Excellent support is given to developing students' communication skills, regardless of whether or not English is their first language, and consequently all students make significant gains in this area of their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The way in which all staff work to respect each student's dignity is of the highest order and, consequently, they ensure that students' personal development is outstanding. All students thoroughly enjoy coming to school and attendance is excellent. Behaviour in classrooms and round the school is exemplary because of the consistent application of the behaviour policy by staff and the excellent role models that they provide. Students are very aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and all take full advantage of the sports clubs that are available. These good habits are endorsed fully in lessons. There are excellent opportunities for students to develop work-based skills through the regular work placements for older learners. The recent school production of 'Mamma Mia' is an outstanding example of how successful the school is in helping its students to successfully challenge and address their individual difficulties.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Through a very focused programme of training, all staff are able to gain the skills and confidence they need to address the extremely wide range and diversity of students' needs. A range of therapists work very closely with staff to ensure that all students gain the communication and interaction skills that are critical to their development. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly with a clear focus on the needs of individuals and how these will be met. They give comprehensive guidance to their teaching assistants so that lessons proceed smoothly. This seamless pattern of support in lessons ensures that students quickly develop the self-esteem and confidence they need to succeed. The excellent relationships between staff and students

are the bedrock for the very successful learning that results. Regular and rigorous assessment by staff, linked to very effective self- and peer-assessment with older students, ensures that all are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Since the last inspection, all areas of the curriculum have been significantly improved. Across the school, there are excellent opportunities for all students to develop the skills they will need in the future. A very wide range of accreditation is available, enhanced very effectively by opportunities at the local colleges and through work experience and placements. By making extremely good use of real life experiences, particularly those in a local, national and international context, the curriculum provides unique and seamless opportunities for all students to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and have a significant impact on students' excellent personal and academic development. Central to the school's success are the commitment and time that all staff devote to the personal mentoring of students. The school provides a safe and secure environment that enables students to face the challenges of school life successfully. It is a very harmonious community with no bullying and there have been no exclusions. Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. A particular feature of this area of the school's work is how quickly all newcomers across the school settle into routines, which are crucial to their future success. The excellent support that all staff give to helping students ensures that they always meet, and very often exceed, the targets set in their individual education plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and vision of the headteacher are outstanding and are central to ensuring that the school has continued to improve on the standards set at the last inspection. The stability in the senior leadership group, linked to the energy and enthusiasm it generates, ensures that the school continues to improve rapidly. This is particularly noticeable in its successful bid for specialist status, which has enhanced students' experience and stimulated their learning. Governors play an active part in the life of the school and they act very effectively as its 'critical friend'. In part, this is due to the very effective system through which new governors are mentored by their more experienced colleagues. This ensures that new members very quickly adapt to their new roles and responsibilities and are able to play a full part in proceedings. The Investor in People award reflects the effort and resources the school has invested in developing the skills of staff. These have paid dividends in ensuring that all staff have the confidence and skills needed to work successfully with students with a very wide range of needs. Consequently, the school is extremely successful in teaching students with severe and profound learning difficulties in the same class.

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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

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	1	
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?	1	
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	1	
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

07 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Walton Leigh School, Walton-on-Thames, KT12 5AB

Thank you for the help that you gave me when I came to inspect your school. I enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. I was very pleased to be invited to a meeting of your school council. Your behaviour is excellent and I know that you like coming to school very much. You also like to keep healthy by playing games with your friends and relaxing in the dance sessions and in the swimming pool. You told me that you really like all the staff and that they are always willing to help you. The list of things that you like about the school was so long I could not get them all in, but swimming, computers, cooking and trips were very popular.

All of the staff are working very hard to help you learn as much as you can. Walton Leigh is an excellent school and I have asked the headteacher and senior managers to make it even better by making some changes in the way it is managed. You can help by always doing your best in all your lessons.

Yours faithfully

Stuart Charlton

Lead Inspector