

Heathermount

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133743
Local Authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	328746
Inspection date	25 November 2008
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Merryl WahogoHMI

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	46
Sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The proprietor Ms Sue Akester
Headteacher	Mr David Curry
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2006
School address	The Learning Centre Devenish Road Ascot SL5 9PG
Telephone number	01344 875101
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector and a Care Inspector. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and boarding provision. The Care Inspector spent time in the boarding provision on the day before the Additional Inspector arrived as well as being there on the day he was present.

Description of the school

Heathermount is a non-maintained school owned by the Disabilities Trust, a registered charity. It provides education for learners who have Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which includes Aspergers Syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity and associated communication and behavioural difficulties. The school is registered for up to eight weekly boarders. Currently, one learner is accommodated weekly and a further three learners access the provision on a regular basis as requested by their local authorities.

Learners are almost all boys of White British heritage; there are only two girls on roll. Currently a quarter are new to the school. None is at the early stages of learning English. Learners come from a wide geographical area. All have a statement of special educational need and do not have to study the National Curriculum.

The school has gone through a significant period of change, which has included changes of leadership and staffing. The current leadership team is in its infancy, the headteacher having only been appointed in May of this year and two assistant headteachers officially in post from September. The school has the National Autistic Societies 'Autism accreditation' and offers an outreach service to local authorities.

The headteacher is responsible for both care and education in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Heathermount provides a satisfactory education for its learners. Its aims and mission statement are currently under review following a change of leadership and management structure. Notwithstanding this, the school is successful in helping learners manage their autism and make sense of the world around them. A significant strength of the school is the highly collaborative approach of the multi-disciplinary staff involved. These include specialist subject teachers, teaching assistants, subject and further education tutors, care staff, a team of speech and language therapists, an education psychologist, a clinical psychologist, occupational therapists and a Connexions worker. This contributes highly to learners' well-being and preparation for the next stage of their lives. A strong culture of communication with parents keeps them fully informed of the progress their children make. As a result, parents are supportive of the school. One expressing the sentiments of many others, commented, 'We feel the school really understands our son's needs and is helping prepare him for interaction with the world as an adult and to control his feelings.'

Learners' achievement across the school is satisfactory. Standards on entry vary but are generally below those expected for learners' ages. Because of missed schooling, some learners require a phased introduction back into the world of education. Progress can be slow, and on occasion erratic. However, the overall progress they make in relation to their starting points is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11, many achieve national accreditations and by the time they leave at the end of sixth form, some have progressed to level 2. All make good progress in improving their communication skills.

Learners' personal development and well-being are good. Because of a carefully planned induction programme and the individual support they receive, learners improve their self-esteem and independence and learn to interact positively with one another and the adults they work with. This successfully improves their interest in, and enjoyment of, education. Learners' attitudes and behaviour improve as they move through the school. In an 'upper sixth' life skills lesson, for example, all were thoroughly involved in a research task to find different kinds of clock faces, using information and communication technology (ICT). Older learners attend work experience placements, which prepares them well for the next stage of their education or training.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers and other adults know their learners very well and have established good working practices and relationships. Learners comment that they feel their teachers help them a lot. The curriculum is satisfactory and supports learners' personal and academic progress well. There is an appropriate focus on improving learners' key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, the impact of recent changes and innovations has yet to be established by the school. Good quality care, guidance and support for learners is effective because it supports each individual in very specific ways and ensures all are looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff in working with learners in both the school and boarding provision underpin this aspect of the school's work. However, support for learners' academic progress is less effective because there is insufficient focus on setting specific targets for individual learners.

Leadership and management are satisfactory at all levels. The headteacher and the new leadership team have provided a new focus for improvement and have set a clear direction. It is, however, too early to judge the impact of some of the changes they have already put in

place and the progress being made towards areas identified for development. Though the school has much data on the small steps learners make in their progress, the analysis and use of this to plan future strategies is less developed. Capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Sixth form provision is satisfactory. Although standards are below those expected for their age because of their special needs, learners make satisfactory progress from below average starting points. Some build on their previous success in the main school and achieve further success in national vocational courses. At the end of the last school year, all five leavers continued to further education or training. Learners continue to make good progress in their independence and social skills and many work towards the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) certificate in community volunteering. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, meeting learners' needs well. Individualised learning programmes support learners well and include preparation for life activities as well as a range of other enrichment activities to enliven learning. The curriculum in the boarding provision for sixth form learners provides added breadth and interest. Good quality care, guidance and support promote learners' personal development very well. However, support for academic progress is less effective because academic target setting is not yet fully in place. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The standards in boarding are good. Heathermount has acted on most of the recommendations from the last report. Those that remain are either minor or being addressed.

Staff pay attention to all aspects of keeping the young people healthy. The commitment of some staff to supporting young people's exercise regimes is outstanding. Young people are positive about the food provided, and some shop and cook for themselves. There are high standards of cleanliness and orderliness in the kitchens. The cook is well aware of young people's specific dietary requirements.

Young people are generally healthy, only occasionally needing homely remedies. They say they are looked after well if they feel ill. Staff store medicines and record their administration properly.

Staff maintain confidentiality by keeping records securely. The designated member of staff for child protection makes sure that all staff are up to date with their training in this regard. However, not all ancillary and maintenance staff fully understand the training they have received. This creates the risk that such staff would not know what to do if they witnessed or heard anything of concern. Child protection policy and procedures are an essential part of the induction for new staff. Staff are committed to managing behaviour through rewards and calming and demonstrate genuine care about the young people.

The bursar ensures that risk assessments are carried out and in some cases displayed to remind staff about how to manage the relevant risk. She responds to repair needs, so that they are carried out promptly. Staff do not, however, ensure that all risk assessments are properly dated. This means that they could be inappropriate for current use. Fire safety is generally good. Fire drills are carried out regularly in the school but not in the boarding area, so that young people

may not be familiar with the routine. Also radiators in the boarding area are not covered, posing a small risk. The risks associated with these shortfalls are small.

Senior managers ensure that the recruitment process for new staff is extremely thorough.

Boarding staff support boarders to complete homework assignments and build their independent living skills. For example, one young man was delighted that a member of staff is helping him learn how to shop for and cook Chinese meals. Staff escort boarders to make use of IT suites in other areas when necessary, although a computer is being installed in the boarding house.

There is a wide range of therapeutic specialists, many of whom are employed by the school itself, who support the young people's individual needs well. Equally, staff value every opportunity for young people to engage in sporting and leisure activities. All the boarders enjoy their time in the residential unit, stressing how kind and helpful staff are.

Heathermount uses a well structured school council to gauge the young people's views. Students order food from the menu on a weekly basis, which allows the cook to determine which dishes are preferred. Nevertheless, staff enjoy helping the young people to expand the range of foods eaten.

Staff write detailed care plans, ensuring that others know how best to work with the young people. They appreciate parents' needs and do their best to give them good support. One parent says 'There is excellent communications with parents. Great help with dealing with our son's needs. Great relationship with the residential staff, trying to teach our son independency skills'. This is despite the fact that no student boards in the residential unit for more than four nights a week. Boarders also have mobile phones and staff enable the students to access phones and computers in staff offices.

There are extensive and beautiful grounds containing a number of different exercise areas and stimulating sculptures. All areas of the residential building are in an excellent state of decoration and repair and provide homely and spacious accommodation. This ensures that young people have ample opportunity to enjoy their own company when necessary. Boarding staff also support young people to learn such skills as cleaning and doing laundry.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff run a weekly cultural awareness evening and relevant policies and procedures are good.

Senior staff demonstrate a high awareness of the needs of children and young people in the design of the handbooks. There is a well produced school magazine, available to all students and parents.

The senior management team ensures that staff are adequate in number, experience and qualification. They also make continuous training available, and are setting up a new supervision structure, since the boarding staff are new.

Both the head of centre and governors conduct regular monitoring and staff respond appropriately to their recommendations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the analysis and use of data to inform future strategies.
- Introduce the use of formal academic target setting for learners.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the newly introduced curriculum.
- The school must ensure that it meets the National Minimum Standards currently not met as detailed below:

- strengthen child protection training for ancillary and maintenance staff, such that they are clear about policies and procedures (NMS 5)
- ensure that all aspects of health safety and security are met (NMS26).

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school's analysis of data to track learners' progress has recently become established and is helping staff to identify the gains in learning made by each individual. On entry to the school, attainment is varied but some younger learners operate at levels that are well below average. Although pupils' progress can be erratic because of the nature of their learning difficulties, it is satisfactory overall. By the end of Year 11, although standards remain below average, most gain national accreditations in English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory achievement from pupils' starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners report that they enjoy the amount of physical activities they can take part in and have a good understanding of how to live healthily. Their involvement in cooking activities develops not only their understanding of healthy eating but also prepares them well for adulthood. Though there are some instances of unacceptable behaviour, staff handle these well, which results in minimal disruption to learning. Though attendance is below the national average, it is satisfactory overall because of improvements made by learners in comparison to their previous schools. Learners' views are regularly sought by the school and they take part actively in the school council, if necessary being supported by a speech and language therapist.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers and other adults have a calm and supportive approach to encourage learning. They are particularly effective in the use of praise, which helps keep learners motivated and on task. Planning ensures that learners have sufficient opportunities to work individually as well as providing opportunities for group work. The school recognises that some newer staff need further development in their understanding of autism in order to make their teaching even more effective. Teachers use high quality ICT resources well to enliven learning. In the lower school, teachers and learners used the interactive whiteboard to good effect during a numeracy lesson about 'Carroll' diagrams. However, in another lesson seen a practical activity went on too long and some learners became distracted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Although learners do not have to study the full National Curriculum because of their statements of special educational need, the school ensures that all have opportunities to experience a

range of subjects. The school has developed its own curriculum to focus on the needs of autistic learners, which supports their personal development particularly well. However, the overall effectiveness of what is offered has yet to be evaluated. The school has recently offered accreditation in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The first group of learners has just started the courses so it is not possible to comment on the success of the outcomes. Impressive grounds and facilities for physical activities broaden learning opportunities and enhance the quality of learners' personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Learners' progress and well-being are at the forefront of the school's ethos of care and education. Highly effective working relationships with a range of other specialist agencies and professionals contribute extensively. All learners carry with them their own very useful individual 'organiser', which contains information to help them when they have difficulties. Teachers also take their classes to the 'well-being' room, which provides a calm and meditative ambience. Though personal care, guidance and support is particularly strong, academic care and guidance is less so because there is insufficient emphasis on setting targets to improve learners' academic progress and achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Through effective self-evaluation, the school is improving well its awareness of its strengths and areas for development. The senior leadership team is starting to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning more effectively. There is a range of assessment data available on learners but the analysis and use of this by the senior leadership team is not sharp enough. It is not being used, for example, to help the school plan future strategies, hence ultimately improving further the progress learners make. The school ensures that every learner does matter and that their particular special needs are met. It also does all it can to promote community cohesion - involving learners in the local and wider community as much as practicable and having the local community support the curriculum. The governing body works well in being a supportive friend 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?	3	3
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 effectiveness of boarding provision	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
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	3	3
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	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

09 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heathermount, Ascot, SL5 9PG

I hope you remember me. I visited your school recently to see how well you were doing. I was with another inspector and she had a personal assistant to help her.

We thought your school was OK and that the boarding part was good.

You make good progress in becoming independent and your communication skills improve.

You seem happy with the school and enjoy the activities you have.

The headteacher and his new senior team look after you well.

Those of you who are in the boarding house have lots to do.

The school could help you even more by:

- setting you targets to get more qualifications
- check that the curriculum is working well
- making some things in the boarding house even better.

I hope all goes well for you in the future.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead Inspector