

Applefields School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134727
Local Authority	York
Inspection number	328961
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Emerson

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)	129
Sixth form	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Adrian Cook
Headteacher	Mr G Gilmore
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2006
School address	Bad Bargain Lane Burnholme York North Yorkshire YO31 0LW
Telephone number	01904 553900
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Applefields School is the City of York's secondary special school provision. The school also includes some pupils from North Yorkshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Two thirds of the pupils have severe or moderate learning difficulties with a growing number of pupils having more complex needs, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). A significant number of the pupils with ASD have additional challenging behaviour. As a result of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, attainment on entry to the school is exceptionally low. The school serves a mixed socio-economic population. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Applefields is a good and improving school with outstanding features. The school is now well established with a stable and committed staff. A culture of high aspirations is evident and this is reflected in the good improvement since the previous inspection. Overall, care, support and guidance are good. Very good care and support, in conjunction with a very strong programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), enable students to achieve exceptionally well in their personal development. They make excellent progress in learning to stay safe and healthy. Procedures to keep pupils safe, including child protection procedures, are robust and all current safeguarding requirements are fully met. The strong emphasis on developing functional and independent living skills prepares pupils well to succeed in adult life. The school council is very active and effective. Its members are rightly proud of the way they have held, and used, a budget to purchase equipment to enliven break times. The strong links with other secondary school councils in the city help to promote a positive picture of disability. This supports community cohesion well. Pupils, including those with challenging behaviour, make extremely good progress in improving their behaviour because of the very carefully thought out systems for behavioural management. Pupils are very clear about what their targets are for improving their social skills and behaviour. However, they are sometimes not involved as well as they could be in setting and reviewing individual targets for learning. As a result, pupils occasionally do not understand exactly what their learning targets are.

Pupils' and students' achievement is good because they are well taught. Pupils make good progress in learning the key skills of literacy, numeracy, and information communication technology (ICT). Excellent relationships and high expectations for behaviour result in very purposeful lessons where pupils try very hard and make good progress. Staff are particularly skilled at teaching pupils to communicate using signing, symbols or speech. As a result, pupils achieve well and become confident communicators. Teaching is very well adapted to meet the needs of learners with more complex difficulties, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties or ASD. As a result, these pupils make as good progress as other pupils. The school fully implements its policy to promote equality and diversity and makes careful checks to ensure that all groups of learners are achieving equally well. Assessment has improved well since the previous inspection and teachers are now working effectively together to ensure that information gained from assessment is accurate. However, in a small minority of lessons, teachers do not make full enough use of this information to ensure that work set precisely meets the needs of all learners and provides a good level of challenge for the more able.

The curriculum is good and outstanding in the sixth form. Pupils access a good and developing range of externally accredited courses. Pupils enjoy school very much because of the interesting range of lessons and activities, which include a very good variety of enrichment activities. In particular, there are very strong programmes for performing arts and physical education. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their outstanding attendance with almost half the pupils having an attendance rate of 98% or more this school year.

The school is well led and managed. Since the previous inspection, the role of subject leaders has developed well. This has improved monitoring and delivery of the curriculum and helped to improve pupils' achievement. Members of the senior leadership team are ambitious and are moving the school forward at a good pace. The headteacher has very successfully managed the merger of the four existing special schools to create a happy and aspirational school. His skills have been complemented very well by the deputy headteacher who has driven the improvements

in key areas such as assessment and tracking of pupil progress. Governance is good. The governing body provides a good level of support and is an effective critical friend. The school has a good capacity to improve further. Resources are well managed and the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good with some outstanding features. It is well led and managed and has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Students access an outstanding curriculum with an extremely good focus on developing important social and independent living skills, such as how to use public transport. Consequently, their personal development is excellent. Very strong links with several local colleges of further education prepare students very well to move into the next stage of their education. For example, as a result of these links, in 2008 a high attaining student was able to achieve GCSEs at a neighbouring secondary school. A well planned enterprise scheme, where students make packed lunches and sell them to staff members, and good opportunities for work experience, prepare students effectively for the work place. The range of accredited courses has developed well this year so that all students, including those with more complex needs, can now achieve nationally recognised qualifications. In 2008 students achieved well and gained a variety of useful qualifications including entry level certificates in adult literacy, adult numeracy and preparation for employment. Teaching is good and teachers and support staff are particularly skilled at relating to students as young adults. As a result, students demonstrate mature attitudes in lessons and make very good progress in learning how to take responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. The quality of care and support is very good. As in the main school, on a small minority of occasions students do not have a clear enough understanding of their targets for learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils, including higher attainers, are challenged by setting work that is always precisely matched to their individual learning levels.
- Help students to understand and use their targets for learning as confidently as they use those for social development and behaviour.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Because of pupils learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards of work are exceptionally low for pupils of their age. However, their achievement is good. The school now holds a growing amount of information gained from assessment and this is carefully moderated to ensure that it is accurate. It indicates that pupils make good progress and generally achieve well against the targets set in their individual plans and when compared to pupils with similar learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Analysis carried out by the school indicates that all groups of pupils, including those with more complex needs such as profound and multiple learning difficulties or ASD, make good progress overall in English, mathematics and science. However, on a small number of occasions, pupils, particularly those who are more able, make slower progress because they are not set work that is sufficiently challenging. Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well in PSHCE because they are given very good opportunities to practise their personal and social skills. A focus on communication permeates all lessons and other activities and staff are skilled at promoting alternative methods of communication. As a

result, all pupils make very good progress in communicating using methods suitable for their individual needs such as signing, symbols, speech and technical aids. In 2008 around half the Year 11 pupils attained entry level passes in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, ICT and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' attitudes in lessons and behaviour around the school are generally excellent because they respond very well to the very strong systems to promote good behaviour. Pupils told the inspectors that there is virtually no bullying. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Because of excellent provision, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Uplifting experiences, such as the very inclusive choir and excellent assemblies, promote pupils' personal qualities exceptionally well. Pupils and students develop into very responsible and caring young people and make an exceptionally strong contribution to the school. Initiatives, such as participation in a consultation group which meets regularly with research staff from the University of York, benefit the wider community very well as they help to improve provision for children with disabilities and their families.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form are good. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and consequently the pupils are highly motivated to learn. Teaching methods are very well adapted to the particular needs of learners with more complex difficulties. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties remain highly alert and engaged with learning because of excellent and creative use of interactive whiteboards. The very well planned routines and consistent management in the specialist classes for pupils with ASD ensure that the pupils feel secure and learn well. Staff are highly effective in managing any incidents of challenging behaviour. As a result, lessons proceed smoothly. Pupils are supported very well to develop their communication skills. This was evident in an English lesson where pupils made very good progress in learning how to frame an argument about the relative rights of farmers and animals. Teachers are assessing work more accurately and using information gained from assessment much more effectively than at the previous inspection. However, in a small minority of lessons work is not always sufficiently adapted to provide a good level of challenge for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved well since the previous inspection and is now good with a very good variety of exciting enrichment activities, including residential trips for students. The curriculum is well planned to ensure a good balance between developing key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and giving pupils a variety of creative and physical experiences. Personal and social development, including pupils' and students' understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, is promoted very well. The school places a very good emphasis on developing functional living skills to enable pupils and students to become as independent as possible. Class groupings ensure that the curriculum is well matched to the particular needs of groups of learners with

different learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, in the specialist classes for pupils with ASD, there is an effective emphasis on providing a 'low distraction' environment where visual symbols are used well to promote communication.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Strong pastoral systems and excellent links with outside agencies ensure that all pupils, including particularly vulnerable pupils such as those who are looked after by the local authority, are very well cared for. Parents and carers value the quality of care and support which their children receive and regard it as a strength of the school. Pupils told the inspectors that relationships are very good and there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem. There are very good procedures in place to keep pupils safe and healthy and all current safeguarding requirements are met. Pupils and students have well planned targets for behaviour and social development which are shared well with them. However, pupils are not yet always fully involved in setting and reviewing their targets for learning. This means that they sometimes do not fully understand exactly how they can improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management has improved at all levels since the previous inspection. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are a very effective team who are driving the school forward at a good pace while maintaining a happy and stable school. They are well supported by the senior leadership team. Subject leaders are more effective and are increasingly involved in closely monitoring the quality of provision in their subject areas. Whole-school assessment procedures and the use of information gained from assessment to set targets and evaluate progress have considerably improved. However, the school rightly recognises that this is an area which could still be developed further. The school has a good understanding of how well it is doing. For example, the school's records regarding monitoring the quality of teaching fit very closely with the judgements of teaching made by inspectors. The school promotes equality, diversity and community cohesion well, both through providing a positive view of disability in the community and through ensuring that provision is well adapted for pupils with different needs. Governors continue to provide the high quality of support and challenge noted at the previous inspection.

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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?	1	1
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	

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	1
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?	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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	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**

I know that some of you find reading very difficult, so your teachers will tell you about this letter. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when inspectors visited your school. We enjoyed finding out about the things you are doing and talking to you. It was very useful to know what you think about your school. We both thought the choir sang really well and I liked the Chinese dragon in assembly!

Your parents and carers think you go to a good school and we agree with them. There are some things that are particularly good in your school.

- Your excellent behaviour – you try very hard in lessons and make excellent progress in learning to improve your behaviour.
- Your school has outstanding links with outside agencies. These help to ensure that you are very well cared for.
- You make very good progress in learning to communicate and in developing your independence skills.
- You take part in interesting activities, especially in sport and performing arts.
- You make excellent progress in learning how to stay safe and healthy.

All of this is possible because the headteacher, staff and governors do a good job and try their best to make the school as good as they can for you.

I have asked your teachers to improve two things.

- Make sure that all work set is challenging and is at just the right level for each of you.
- Help you to understand and use your learning targets as well as you use those for your social development and behaviour.

We hope you carry on enjoying what you are doing and continue to help your teachers all you can.