

# Peterhouse School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133748
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sefton
<b>Inspection number</b>	331948
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Adrian Simm

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

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<b>Boarding provision</b>	
<b>Social care URN</b>	
<b>Social care inspector</b>	Michelle Moss

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	53
Sixth form	18
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Lisa Slater
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Graham Birtwell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Preston New Road Southport Merseyside PR9 8PA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01704 506682
<b>Fax number</b>	01704 506683

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and two Social Care Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Peterhouse School is a non-maintained special school for pupils between the ages of 5 and 19. It is administered by the charity Autism Initiatives. There are currently on roll 41 boys and 12 girls. All pupils have a statement of special educational need for autism or Asperger's syndrome. They may have challenging behaviour, severe communication difficulties and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The nature of the learners' difficulties means they are working well below national expectations. However, on occasions, pupils have exceptional talents in mathematics and art. Nearly all pupils are of White British background with an extremely small number with mixed White and Black African heritage. A small number of pupils are looked after by a local authority. The school has a small residential provision off site. A few pupils are resident full time with respite care offered to a very small minority. Pupils are placed at the school by their local authority and the school maintains links currently with 17 different authorities. The school has gained Artsmark Gold status and the Silver Standard for the Princess Diana Awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Peterhouse is an outstanding school. The school has maintained this high level since the last inspection. Staff welcome pupils as equals and each day cross many bridges together. As one member of staff put it, 'We don't expect the pupils to cross each bridge on their own. We meet them over half way and walk back with them'. This ethos is praiseworthy, and together with the extremely broad range of the staff's skills results in pupils gaining exceptionally well; firstly in their personal development which then impacts extremely positively on their academic achievement.

Pupils' outstanding personal development is seen, for example, in the enthusiastic way in which they take part in lessons, clubs and play together at break times; how they respond socially to staff and each other, witnessed in excellent behaviour, and working, playing and eating together at lunchtimes; their successes in charity work for others both locally and abroad, the highly acknowledged outcomes for Key Stage 4 pupils and further education students in work experience and enterprise skills. Some pupils have reached a point where they now take action independently to show they need time to calm themselves when they recognise tensions are growing. This is excellent.

Overall, pupils achieve extremely well from their individual starting points in communication, literacy, numeracy, science and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Very detailed school data points to outstanding achievement for pupils of all ages; boys and girls, those in care of the local authority, those from different backgrounds and those with more complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an increasing trend in pupils gaining accreditation by the end of Key Stage 4 in Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) awards together with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge. From 2006/2007 to 2008/2009, the number of pupils gaining awards has more than doubled. In addition, for example, pupils produce exquisite artwork some of which was exhibited in Southport during the inspection. Very astutely, the views of two parents echo those of others. 'The school works really hard to meet the complex needs of children with autism'. 'Pupils make progress on many fronts including self-help and social skills, language development and information and communication technology to name a few'.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together to ensure pupils learn at just the right level for their individual needs. Staff concentrate on, with great success, social communication, social relationships and flexible thinking skills. They know the pupils' needs extremely well; they know the circumstances that trigger pupils' concerns and make every effort to 'think ahead' to avoid these or to plan how to overcome them. In this way they ensure improvement by offering new and challenging situations, but in a careful and guided way. Pupils' enjoyment is seen frequently by the huge smiles on their faces and displays of satisfaction when 'a mountain has been climbed'. For example, the completion by older pupils of a very 'professional' DVD, which included animation and personal appearances, in their media lessons was a terrific feat for them. The extremely high quality teaching and learning is across an exceptionally broad and interesting curriculum, on and off the school site. Visits out of school, lunchtime clubs, residential visits, and visitors into schools such as artists and musicians all contribute to an extremely worthwhile all-round experience in which learning is individualised for all pupils.

Overall, leadership and management are good. Senior leaders are outstanding and provide an extremely clear direction for the school. They ensure overall that the school's extremely strong care, guidance and support systems combine in the most effective way for pupils and their families. Targets for learning are sharp, challenging but achievable and the monitoring of these contributes to the school's first-class knowledge of each pupil's progress. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have galvanised a staff team that is very clear what else needs to be done to develop the school even further. The school's Education Committee (governing body) is satisfactory in its role. It receives and discusses reports from the headteacher and generally meets the expectations placed upon it. However, the line of accountability for monitoring fully the school as a whole between the Board of Trustees and the Education Committee is not always as clear and effective as it might be. Despite this, the outstanding outcomes for pupils mean the school offers excellent value for money and has the capacity currently to sustain this level of excellence.

### **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

#### **Grade: 1**

Students achieve extremely well in the sixth form (known in school as the Further Education department). The increasing trend in pupils gaining accreditation by the end of Key Stage 4 in OCR and ASDAN is mirrored in the sixth form. Students succeed very well on ASDAN courses leading to Towards Independence accreditation. Also, a grade A\* in GCSE art gained by one student and another who gained RSM piano at grade 1 in 2008 are remarkable examples of how individual talents are channelled and success achieved in relation to their starting points. The students flourish as a result of the high quality teaching, curriculum and very personalised planning which is set out in sharply focused individual education plans. Students are expected to relate successfully to all the staff so that they respond appropriately and consistently to more than one person and in different situations. This prepares them exceptionally well for other activities, such as, work experience and enterprise skills. These activities are very well planned including the use of symbols relevant to the particular jobs and advance visits for students to ready themselves for the work. Excellent leadership and management of the sixth form ensure an expansion of opportunities that already include hairdressing, office and shop work and 'volunteer' work with the National Trust and Martin Mere wetlands. Literacy, numeracy and social skills are all put to excellent use on these work-placements; also on enterprise work, for example, turning a £20 starting fund into profit through making, pricing and selling jewellery, the proceeds of which go to needy children in Africa.

### **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

#### **Grade: 3**

The small residential provision was judged to be satisfactory, and the national minimum standards are met overall. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure the Education Committee is effective in carrying out fully its responsibilities to monitor the effectiveness of the school as a whole, and to subsequently advise the Board of Trustees on all matters.

### **National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care**

The small residential provision was judged to be satisfactory, and the national minimum standards are met overall. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Because the school is extremely good at reducing pupils' anxieties and preparing them to learn, pupils grow in self-esteem, they communicate far more effectively with others, explain their likes and dislikes and begin to make choices about their life. All of this sets the foundation for pupils to achieve extremely well in a broad range of subjects made against measurable targets or against detailed assessments. While individual pupils' success might peak and trough depending on personal circumstances, overall, from their starting points, they make outstanding progress in communication, literacy, numeracy, science and personal, social, health and citizenship education. The increasing trend in pupils gaining accreditation by the end of Key Stage 4 in OCR awards together with the ASDAN Transition Challenge is testimony to the levels of work pupils reach. During the three years from 2007 to 2009, the number of pupils gaining awards at Level 1 or 2 has doubled in subjects such as mathematics, physical education, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Evidence points to all pupils regardless of their gender, background or learning difficulty and/or disability achieving equally well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

For pupils with challenging behaviour and severe communication difficulties, behaviour is first-rate. Although instances of unacceptable behaviour occur, they are as a result of the pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is no history of exclusions. Typical comments from parents responding to the questionnaire for the inspection were, 'the support that my child receives is of the highest standard and for the first time ever, goes to school with a smile on his face' and 'my daughter is now a very happy young lady'. Attendance this year at nearly 96% for pupils with such severe difficulties, some of whom have mental health problems, is outstanding and testifies to the extremely high and personalised support offered to pupils and their families. Through the support of pupils' individual faiths and ethnic backgrounds; the development of far greater inner-awareness, self-esteem and self-control; the valuing of others both in school, in the community and beyond through charity work and fundraising, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Healthy eating, understanding how to keep safe and well, are all integral elements of what the pupils learn exceeding well. The basic food hygiene course that Key Stage 4 pupils undertook this year was extremely successful. As a result of the pupils' many successes in their personal and academic development, they are extremely well equipped for the next stages in their life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Outstanding teaching and learning are based upon the foundation of staff knowing each pupil as an individual. Detailed assessment contributes to this in a significant way leading to a wealth of information upon which teaching and learning flourishes. Very sharp targets are set for pupils to achieve and pupils' progress towards the targets is monitored closely. Staff strive constantly to learn more about their pupils in order to build even better ways of working. As one member of staff put it, 'we can see the tip of the iceberg but we are constantly seeking to discover and work with the rest'. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff

are excellent; staff work extremely hard to achieve this situation and are experts in reducing pupils' anxiety levels as far as possible. Pupils are praised constantly and sincerely for their achievements and are pointed in the right direction for further improvement. Sensory stimuli, symbols, pictures and signing are all used as a natural part of lessons to aid communication and thinking skills and boost independent thought and actions. In one lesson, a pupil decided to stand inside a cupboard and close the door. Although reluctant initially to come out, staff knew exactly how to ease the situation so that within minutes, he began working with everyone else. Staff's detailed understanding of the pupils' needs, strong subject expertise and enthusiasm combine to allow pupils to make excellent progress in personal development and academic skills relative to their starting points.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is extremely suitable for the pupils' ages and stages of development. From the moment pupils arrive in school each morning to the minute they leave in the afternoon, every moment of the day is a planned learning experience. In the classroom, on the playground, at lunchtime, in school clubs and during off-site visits, the curriculum is planned to give pupils opportunities to develop awareness of themselves and to interact verbally and socially with others and thus make choices. Across all subjects, challenging improvement in personal development leads the way, followed closely by the particular subject skills and knowledge. Science, expressive arts, physical education, design and technology, ICT and PSHCE offer a breadth of practical opportunities for much enjoyment as well as the skills and knowledge gained. Learning is constantly put into use in visits off-site and residential experiences so that pupils practise and discover the value of the learning they have mastered. Staff and pupils have put much effort into working towards the Healthy Schools Award and are close to submitting their bid once the Education Committee has ratified relevant policies. For pupils able to benefit from working at other schools, this option is used to very good effect, such as the pupil who gained the GCSE grade A\* in art in 2008.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Every member of staff spoken to during the inspection was extremely clear about the pupils' individual needs and what they needed to thrive. The quality of annual review documentation for parents, including a DVD of achievements during the year, is second to none. Transition plans for sixth form students leaving the school and moving to other settings follow the same detailed pattern of information; very clear where the students are up to in their learning and equally clear what needs to happen next in ensuring continuous development for the pupil or student. This clarity of knowledge comes from extremely detailed methods of assessing pupils' and students' progress in personal development and their work. Recent improvement to be even clearer, for example, about what might be the triggers for instances of poorer behaviour are well on their way. Leaders and staff are very clearly dedicated to what is best for the pupils and their families. This includes very strong multi-agency working with the health service, for example, speech and language, occupational and physiotherapy. To this end a family liaison officer works tirelessly to ensure high quality support for all. Detailed risk assessments are carried out for pupils and activities, and staff are up-to-date in their child protection training.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Staff with leadership and management responsibilities at all levels have an extremely clear understanding of how well pupils and staff are succeeding in their work. Monitoring of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning is very perceptive and rigorous. The school does not stand still 'and rest on its laurels'. Targets set for improvement are very sharp and challenging, but because of the planning and support offered to all classes across the school, they are achieved regularly. All staff are crystal clear about the school's strengths, not just senior leaders, and all are clear where they are going with planned improvements. All of this is done on behalf of each pupil and their families. This is because staff take equality of opportunity extremely seriously. The work of the Education Committee is satisfactory overall. It meets at set times during the year and, for example, receives and discusses reports from the headteacher about the effectiveness of the school. Several members of the committee are parents and have first-hand experience of how well the school works on a day-to-day basis. The committee is involved in development planning and making decisions. On occasions, though, the committee is a little slow in carrying out requirements, for example, in putting into place fully the need to promote community cohesion. However, once done, because of the strengths of pupils' progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, this aspect has quickly become strong. The school meets current government requirements for safeguarding, although bringing together fully all aspects of provision happened quite recently. Overall, the committee's monitoring of the effectiveness of the school as a whole, and subsequently advising the Board of Trustees on all matters is not quite as sharp as it could be.



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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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 effectiveness of boarding provision	3	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	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?	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	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**

Thank you for letting me share two days with you at school. I really enjoyed seeing how well you work and get on together. Those of your parents and carers who responded to my questionnaire for the inspection think you are in a wonderful school and I agree with them.

From the moment you start at school each morning you have lots of interesting activities to take part in. Your teachers and other adults in school help you every minute of the day to enjoy school, join in with others, make choices and explain what you want more clearly. You attend school extremely well and get on with each other most of the time. I really like the DVDs you make including the one for your annual review meeting for your parents or carers. It must be really helpful for them to see first-hand how you have been progressing in your work during the year.

I am sorry I couldn't find the time to come with you to the exhibition of your art in Southport, but your teacher very kindly gave me a programme which contains pictures of your fabulous work. I think your work would grace the walls of any art gallery anywhere in the world. Well done, your teachers, parents or carers must be really proud of you!

Because your headteacher ensures that your school is so outstanding, I have asked that only one thing be improved. That is, how the Education Committee that helps your headteacher to provide you with what you need to learn, ensures that it checks out and plans for every single thing that it is responsible for.

I hope you carry on enjoying school as much as you do now. Keep working hard and getting on well with everyone. You are outstanding young people in every respect.