

Palmerston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104748
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	336357
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Liz Godman

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Carol Chapman
Headteacher	Mrs Lis Burbage
Date of previous school inspection	0 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and a group of students. They observed the school's work and looked at a variety of documents including the school improvement plan, school policies and curriculum guidance. Inspectors took into account the findings from 23 parental questionnaires and from questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well groups of students, with different special educational needs and/or disabilities, make progress and how lessons are planned to secure this
- students' views about how they are helped to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes and about their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- curriculum developments for students aged 14 to 19
- how leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, contribute to and sustain school improvement
- how leaders are maintaining the effectiveness of the sixth form.

Information about the school

Palmerston School caters for students, aged 11 to 19, with severe learning difficulties. Many students also exhibit associated difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders, challenging behaviour and communication difficulties. The school is of average size and students come from across the city of Liverpool. A very high proportion of students are entitled to free school meals. Students come from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, but the large majority are White British. Very few speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher is a National Leader in Education and the school is a National Support School. The school has several national awards which include: Basic Skills, Healthy Schools, Investors in Careers stage 1 and the Liverpool Inclusion Charter mark at advanced level.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Palmerston School provides an outstanding quality of education for its students. This has been sustained since the last inspection, when the school was also judged to be outstanding. The school is exceptionally well led and managed. All staff share a common sense of purpose in seeking to secure the best possible outcomes for the students and in striving to bring about further sustained improvement. This is based on incisive and challenging school self-evaluation, involving a number of partners such as governors, staff and parents and the effective use of the findings to make changes. These factors give the school outstanding capacity for continued and sustained improvement.

Students' achievement and progress throughout the school are outstanding as a result of an extremely well planned curriculum. A key feature of this excellent progress is the growth in independence, self-esteem and confidence as students move through the school. There are no significant variations in the overall progress of groups of students with different special educational needs. Highly effective teaching is a key factor in this. Lessons are exceptionally well planned to build on prior attainment and meet each students' needs. It is a sign of their growing confidence and maturity that some students recognise they are not always involved in identifying how they can improve their work and see this as a next step. Great enjoyment and enthusiasm are evident in all classes, whether speaking Spanish, going on a treasure hunt or baking for a picnic. Behaviour is outstanding. Although some students show challenging behaviour related to their special educational needs, teachers and support staff are highly skilled in minimising the effect this has on learning. This typifies the excellent care, guidance and support provided for students.

Students say that they feel very safe and their parents agree. Students show their excellent understanding of physical fitness by engaging enthusiastically in the wide variety of sporting activities on offer. This is tailored to meet everyone's needs and so ranges from hydrotherapy and rebound trampoline to judo and football. Students make an excellent contribution to the school. This links closely with the highly effective development of workplace skills, fostered through Young Enterprise and including the manufacture and sale of goods for the Christmas fair.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Challenge students even further by encouraging them to identify for themselves how they might improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

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Students' learning and response in lessons are outstanding. Lessons are characterised by students' excellent understanding and concern for their peers. For example, they know that another student is alarmed by loud noises, so they do not clap, but wiggle their thumbs in appreciation. All students show excellent concentration, are prepared to be challenged and are highly motivated to succeed. By the time they leave, all students gain external qualifications. Typically in Year 14, this is the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Towards Independence award. However, a number of students achieve beyond this and gain the ASDAN bronze and silver awards. Some students progress extremely rapidly from very low starting points in Year 7 to gain entry level qualifications at levels 1 or 2 in English, mathematics, science, Spanish and personal, social and health education in Year 11 or 14. In 2009, by the end of Year 14, every student left the school for further education, training or employment, an outstanding achievement. Although students with additional autistic spectrum disorders tend to do less well in applying their skills in mathematics and science, they make great gains in communication and social skills. This represents outstanding progress for these students.

Students are extremely sensible, courteous and friendly to one another, staff and visitors. They understand healthy eating very well, explaining how school dinners could be even healthier. They are actively involved in the inclusive school council and in fund-raising for school and charities. Students' high attendance levels and their well-developed literacy, communication and social skills prepare them extremely well for the future. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students are highly reflective and have a very well-developed moral sense. Cultural development is exceptional because of students' highly positive responses to the excellent opportunities provided by the school, including the celebration of Black History Month, visits to museums, musical performances and work with artists and sports people.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

During lessons, staff frequently provide individual help to enable all students to make rapid progress. For example, support staff worked with higher attaining students in literacy enabling them to write independently, while in an information and communication technology lesson, the support assistant helped a student with very complex needs to use simple switches. Assessment is used extremely well to support learning. Teachers are alert to any difficulties which might arise and adjust their lesson accordingly. Lessons are also characterised by opportunities for students to consider how well they have done, both in the learning and their behaviour. The next step is for students to identify for themselves how they might improve their work. Relationships are excellent and outstanding classroom organisation enables the students to work effectively in teams, with everyone contributing and taking on responsibilities.

There is a strong emphasis in the curriculum on communication, literacy and numeracy. This enables students to make outstanding progress in developing these skills, whether through sensory experiences or through reading, writing and handling money. As students move through the school they use these skills increasingly in different practical applications for the home or workplace. The curriculum also promotes students' excellent personal, social and independence skills as they use facilities in school or in the local community. Elements of this begin in Year 7 where students follow the ASDAN New Horizons scheme. There is an excellent programme of careers education for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, based on the National Standards for Careers Education and Guidance, covering, for example, safety, finance, leisure and going to work. Vocational courses, supplemented by lunchtime clubs for the older students, give varied experiences in horticulture, joinery, hair and beauty, and construction. Residential visits contribute very well to the curriculum because they are closely matched to individuals' capabilities, ranging from a stay with a small group in the school's caravan to adventurous outdoor pursuits.

All staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support, ensuring students are exceptionally happy in school. Staff and other agencies are highly effective in working together to secure the well-being of students whose circumstances make them

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vulnerable. Meetings of the 'team around the school' make sure individual pupils are monitored closely and that any required support is put in place. There is a highly consistent approach to managing challenging behaviour, with the result that situations are calmed rapidly and without confrontation. This ensures students feel very safe and can quickly re-engage in learning. 'Person-centred reviews' are used to very good effect and actively involve the students. As a result, students with severe communication difficulties are able to have a strong voice in planning for their own smooth transition when they leave school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels are relentless in their drive for sustained school improvement. In response to the staff questionnaires, all staff were highly positive about the school's leadership and the extent to which they feel involved in self-evaluation and planning for improvement. All teachers take a keen responsibility for promoting their subject. They are actively involved in monitoring its effectiveness and in taking the initiative to make changes to accelerate students' learning. This helps to ensure that best practice is shared and that the quality of teaching is consistently high.

Governors show an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and are active in promoting the school in the wider community. They are fully involved in auditing the school's work and in contributing to the school improvement plan. Legal obligations are fulfilled to a high standard and the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are exemplary and in line with current government requirements. Staff have an excellent and comprehensive understanding of safeguarding issues and receive regular child protection training to ensure their knowledge is kept up to date.

Engagement with parents is exceptionally positive. The school enables parents' full participation in their child's annual review and provides extremely useful guidance and help on homework, communication and behaviour management. Excellent partnerships with other schools and colleges, arts and cultural organisations, community groups and work-related learning providers, contribute strongly to pupils' outstanding progress and personal development. The school is a strongly cohesive community and is highly effective in increasing students' understanding of the wider community, both within Liverpool and globally. Its work in tackling discrimination based on ethnicity, gender or disability is exemplary. This, combined with consistently excellent outcomes for all

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pupils, indicates the exceptional quality of its work in promoting equality of opportunity and in developing community cohesion. The school provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form was judged to be outstanding at the last inspection. Despite a change of leadership, this strength has been maintained. Following careful evaluation of the provision, new developments are underway. As a result, the sixth form continues to meet the needs of its students most effectively. An excellent curriculum, with a clear focus on preparing students to leave school, ensures there are numerous opportunities to use the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT in practical contexts, such as shopping, making drinks and meals, and developing vocational skills through horticulture or animal care. The hairdressing salon is popular with both male and female students and contributes very well to students' pride in their personal presentation and hygiene. Relationships are highly positive; students are most considerate and show great kindness to one another. They generously celebrate the successes of other students and staff at the end of the day. Careers guidance is excellent and helps to ensure that students are highly successful in continuing in education, or gaining employment or work-related training when they leave. Parents agree that the sixth form helps to prepare their child very well for the future. Teaching is exceptionally well planned, with activities closely matched to students' prior attainment and interests. This ensures students make excellent progress in the sixth form in their academic, social and independence skills.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents responding to the questionnaire were unanimous in their agreement and support for everything the school does for their child. Inspectors agree that this is an excellent school. This is largely consistent with an earlier survey conducted by the school. In response to its own survey, the school provided guidance for parents on how to help at home and on behaviour management. A mark of the success of this is that no parents raised these as concerns in the Ofsted questionnaire. Where parents did add comments, they expressed how much their child enjoys school and their appreciation and thanks for how the school meets their child's needs. One or two also commented on how hard the staff work and how well the school is led and managed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Palmerston School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 23 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 93 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	87	2	9	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	21	91	2	9	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	18	78	5	22	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	65	7	30	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	78	4	17	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	65	6	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	78	5	22	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	70	6	26	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	70	6	26	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	65	7	30	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	65	7	30	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	78	2	9	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	83	4	17	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Palmerston School, Liverpool, L25 6EE

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing the interesting things you do at school.

You told us how much you enjoy school and we can see why. We found that Palmerston is an outstanding school. This is because your headteacher, governors and all the staff work extremely hard to make the school as good as it possibly can be for you. You make excellent progress and rapidly improve your speaking, listening, reading and writing. I was very impressed by how well some of you speak Spanish. One of the reasons that you do so well is because teachers plan lessons which are just right for everyone in the class. Staff keep a very careful check to make sure everyone is involved and learning as quickly as they can. We think you are understanding more and more about how well you are doing. Because of this, we have asked your teachers to do one thing to help you to learn even more quickly. This is to ask you to suggest ways in which you can improve your work. Some of you said in your replies to the questionnaire that you thought this was something that could be better.

We also found that the school takes excellent care of you and helps everyone to get along very well together. We were particularly impressed with the way you are learning about different people, for example through Black History Month. Older students are preparing very well for when they have to leave school. An example of this is Young Enterprise. I hope that you are very successful in selling your products at the Christmas fair! Somehow I think you will be. I know that you will continue to work very hard and to look after one another very well. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ms Liz Godman

Lead inspector

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