

# Merefield School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104979
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sefton
<b>Inspection number</b>	336398
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 May 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alastair Younger

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	61
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Brenda Porter
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Karen Lynskey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 July 2007
<b>School address</b>	Westminster Drive Southport Merseyside PR8 2QZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01704 577163
<b>Fax number</b>	01704 571265
<b>Email address</b>	Head.merefield@schools.sefton.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
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Manchester M2 7LA

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Nine lessons were observed, each taught by a different teacher. Discussions were held with representatives of the governing body, staff and a representative from the local authority. Opportunities to communicate with pupils were taken on an informal basis. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to pupils' progress and their safeguarding. The school's plans for future development and improvement were scrutinised. The responses to 25 parental questionnaires were analysed along with six from pupils.

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

- whether pupils' achievements are fully reflected in the qualifications they gain before leaving
- how well assessment is used by teachers to promote the learning and progress of pupils
- the development of the curriculum to meet the changing needs of pupils
- the leadership and management of large classroom support teams
- the insights pupils gain into the religious, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics of the local and national community.

## Information about the school

This is a small school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. About a third of pupils also have additional needs relating to autistic spectrum conditions. Several of these pupils display unpredictable and challenging behaviours. All pupils have some difficulties with verbal communication and over a half have no verbal or expressive language. Each pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. About a fifth are known to be eligible for free school meals. Pupils can be admitted at any time, but the main points of intake are in the Early Years Foundation Stage, for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and in Year 7, for pupils with autism who transfer from other schools.

The school has appointed two new teachers in the current academic year and two in the previous year.

**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

This is an outstanding school. It has an exceptional headteacher and provides a near perfect environment in which pupils and staff can thrive. The school's self-evaluation is precise and suitably critical. Planning for the future is excellent and leaves no stone unturned. Continuous, seamless improvement prevents the need for major changes which could be unsettling for staff and pupils. Change is being expertly managed, with the result that morale in the school is very high and staff and governors share an immense desire to contribute everything they can to further improvement. Issues for improvement identified by the previous inspection have been addressed. Precise and thorough evaluation of each pupil's progress shows that in nearly every instance individuals are making at least good and often outstanding progress. All of these factors contribute to the school's outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The outstanding care, guidance and support offered to pupils and the excellence of safeguarding procedures, contribute enormously to pupils' feelings of safety and well-being. Pupils contribute enormously to ensuring that the school community runs safely and harmoniously on a day to day basis. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils do everything they can to adopt healthy lifestyles, greatly helped by specialist provision to help them to do so.

Teaching is good overall and often better. Teachers are particularly skilled at promoting pupils' communication skills by whatever means produce the best results. On a few occasions learning and progress is not maximised because not all teachers are equally skilled in deploying expert support to where it can be most effective. The curriculum is outstanding. It is being constantly fine-tuned to ensure that it meets the changing needs of each pupil. One of the most important changes in recent years has been the excellent progress that has been made in improving opportunities for older pupils to gain accreditation and awards that fully reflect their achievements.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that all teachers emulate the best practice evident in many classes, by:
  - ensuring that tasks are precisely matched to individual ability
  - deploying support staff more precisely to help pupils to complete their tasks.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

Pupils contribute enormously to securing outstandingly positive outcomes for themselves. In class, they frequently show a thirst for learning and a desire to be fully

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involved, even when the nature of their needs makes this very difficult. Those pupils with the most profound difficulties show great determination when trying to communicate through gestures such as blinking, pointing or making a noise in response to a stimulus. In classes for those with autism, pupils can be seen making a conscious effort to concentrate on their learning and to allow other pupils to do the same. A few older pupils show great pride in lessons when demonstrating their growing ability to work with increasing independence.

On entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage most children are at the very earliest stages of learning and development and are totally dependent upon adults. Easily the most significant outcome for these pupils is the outstanding way in which they develop the power to communicate. This allows them to make their needs known and enables them to express choice. This makes a huge contribution to their future well-being. The good progress of the more-able pupils is represented by the fact that before leaving, all of them gain nationally accredited awards which celebrate their growing independence and preparation for leaving school.

Attendance is below the national average. There is no unauthorised absence, nearly all of it being for medical reasons related to the nature of pupils' needs and disabilities. Where these are most profound, they often result in repeated and sometimes lengthy hospitalisation. In this school, attendance is not a main factor in determining pupils' future economic well-being; their health is and this is strongly promoted. For instance, two pupils would be unable to attend at all were it not for the specialist support and guidance made available to them to support their health needs.

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and their cultural awareness is good. The school hosts occasional multi-cultural events and has an international link with a school in Africa but these compensate only partially for the fact that the school is situated in a very mono-cultural part of the country.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<sup>1</sup> 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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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b> Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>  The quality of pupils' learning and their progress  The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	<b>2</b>
	*
	2
	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	<b>2</b>
	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good overall and often outstanding. Excellent induction procedures, accompanied by extensive training have ensured that there has been no fall-off in the quality of teaching as a result of staffing changes. Most teachers show an excellent awareness of pupils' limited ability to retain the information they have learned. They carefully balance reinforcement activities with new learning opportunities and ensure that lessons proceed at a pace that challenges pupils without leaving any behind. Stimulating and imaginative resources are utilised in nearly all lessons to capture the attention of pupils and make learning enjoyable and memorable. Teachers demonstrate considerable skill in promoting communication. They use technological aids with confidence and are adept in signing and the use of visual aids. In most lessons, staff teams are very well managed by teachers. There are times, however, when the skills of support staff are not fully utilised; for instance, when their main role is in the management of pupils, who are usually behaving perfectly well, rather than in supporting the learning of pupils with widely varying needs. Assessment information is very well used by teachers when planning lessons, but less well to adjust what is being taught during lessons when it is realised that a few pupils can already do what is being asked of them.

The curriculum fully meets the widely varying needs of all pupils. The outstanding sensory curriculum provides pupils with the most profound needs and disabilities the opportunity to react to stimuli including light, sound and touch. At the other end of the scale, higher attaining pupils are being provided with increasing access to increasingly challenging accredited courses in recognition of the fact that a few have shown early

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signs of being able to achieve success in them. In this respect, the school has been outstandingly vigilant in recognising this. The school has been quick to extend relevant and highly effective practice from the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum into the primary department in order to develop a more creative curriculum. The curriculum is extensively enriched through a wide range of after school clubs, residential experiences, frequent day trips and regular visitors.

Outstanding care, support and guidance of pupils sit at the very heart of the school. This is why pupils feel safe and happy and why most of their parents agree. The school recognises that all pupils are extremely vulnerable and it has ensured that procedures are in place to protect them, not only from other people but also from themselves. At the same time there is a strong awareness that one of the best ways of helping pupils is to make them increasingly independent and thus less reliant on the care guidance and support of others. When pupils are seen to be able to accept responsibility they are encouraged to do so, for instance when they sell goods at parent and carer events. School staff work extremely closely and effectively with a huge range of other professionals and agencies concerned with the care and well-being of pupils. Procedures to maximise attendance are excellent. They involve very close working between health and welfare agencies and families.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Leaders, managers and governors have successfully guided school improvement to ensure that the school has moved on quickly from good, when it was last inspected, to outstanding now. This has been achieved by building a strong senior leadership team and the effective sharing of leadership and management duties amongst many different staff.

Hard decisions have not been shirked in strengthening the staff team to improve teaching. Governors are taking on an increasingly important role in holding senior leaders to account for decisions, whilst maintaining their important role of supporting the work of the school. Individual governors bring pockets of invaluable expertise, such as when they contribute to the outstanding measures to ensure the safeguarding and protection of pupils. One of the stand-out features of these procedures is the risk assessment which contributes to comprehensive individual behaviour plans for pupils with recognised difficulties.

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The school's collaborative working with a huge array of other professionals and agencies is exemplary. These include professionals from the fields of health, mental health, therapy and social welfare. These partnerships contribute enormously to ensuring that all pupils share equal access to the curriculum and equal opportunities to enjoy and achieve. Secure procedures are in place to tackle any form of discrimination.

The school is well aware of its responsibilities for promoting community cohesion. The focus of this frequently lies within the disabled community, where its work is becoming increasingly influential within a local consortium of schools. Pupils come from a wide geographical area and from a huge range of social and economic backgrounds. The school takes great care to monitor how well this mix of pupils interrelates and there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that they do not get on well with one another. The school is well aware that it can do more to improve pupils' awareness of cultures beyond the predominantly White British local community in which it exists. It has evaluated what it already does and drawn up an action plan to help address the issue

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

The Early Years Foundation Stage usually comprises just two or three children, but numbers are augmented by small numbers of very highly dependent pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2 who have been assessed as being likely to benefit from an extension of Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Leadership and management and all aspects of provision are outstanding. Teaching rests in the hands of a highly skilled and experienced teacher who is exceptionally well supported by an established team of



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special support staff. Very few children are able to make reasoned choices for themselves, so nearly all activities are adult led. This is expertly managed to ensure that each day is filled with a fascinating range of activities taking place in different settings, to replicate the ideals of encouraging children to discover how they can learn in many different ways and places. As a result, outcomes for children are outstanding, as is shown in the immaculate records kept by staff, which show the tiny steps by which it can be measured, such as an unexpected response to a stimulus or the palpable signs of enjoyment such as a more animated response to a situation. Excellent partnerships exist with parents and carers and the outstanding care, support and guidance seen throughout the school is equally evident here.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

## Sixth form

The small sixth form is outstanding. Strengths identified by the previous inspection have been built upon and weaknesses have been eliminated. This has been made possible through outstanding leadership and management. Students access a broad and growing range of accreditation opportunities, closely matched to their individual abilities and needs. Courses are often provided in conjunction with partner institutions with whom the school works extremely effectively. The range of courses is being extended to include more challenging courses in preparation for the higher attaining pupils, usually those with autistic spectrum conditions, who are currently moving through the school. All leavers currently gain appropriate accreditation before leaving and for the last three years all leavers have moved on to appropriate post-19 placements. This reflects the outstanding support and guidance they receive through extensive and thorough transition planning. The strongest indicators of progress and achievement are the ways in which students grow in independence, take increasing responsibility for their own actions and for helping others around them. The strengths seen throughout the rest of the school are evident in the sixth form; these include outstanding safeguarding procedures and the excellent promotion of equal opportunities.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
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

A minority of parents and carers responded to a questionnaire circulated prior to the inspection.

Of these, the very large majority expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. In particular, there was huge agreement that their children enjoy school and that teaching is good.

There are however dissenting voices, usually over single issues. The unpredictable behaviour of some pupils with autism spectrum conditions worries a few parents and carers, but they should be reassured that it is extremely rare for this behaviour not to be expertly and effectively managed. It cannot be denied that accidents do happen but every precaution is taken to prevent them. Another criticism of the school is the perception of a very small minority of parents and carers that accessibility to the school is being made harder. They cite the fact that it used to be much more open. Inspectors feel that the school is welcoming of parents and carers but that safeguarding requirements have to be met.

The very small minority of parents and carers who are critical of leadership and management tend to base this view on the turnover of staff. Inspectors feel that this turnover has been particularly well managed, with no tailing off in the quality of teaching and care, nor in the morale of staff.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Merefield 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 25 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 61 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	64	6	24	1	4	1	4
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	56	7	28	2	8	1	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	52	8	32	2	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	48	9	36	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	52	6	24	3	12	2	8
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	60	7	28	2	8	1	4
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)	13	52	5	20	1	4	2	8
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	64	4	16	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	48	5	20	0	0	3	12
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	56	5	20	1	4	2	8
The school is led and managed effectively	12	48	6	24	0	0	3	12
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	14	56	6	24	1	4	1	4

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



1 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merefield School, Southport, PR8 2QZ

Because I know that you are unable to read this letter for yourselves I have made arrangements with the school to make sure that you get to know what it says.

Thank you for welcoming us to your outstanding school the other day.

You made us very happy because you were so nice to us.

We were very pleased to see how much you enjoy everything on your timetable and feel safe.

We enjoyed watching you being taught so well and trying your hardest to learn.

We were thrilled to see how well you are cared for and looked after.

We were very impressed by the way you are becoming more independent by being shown how to make sensible choices.

We think your school is going to keep getting better, especially if teaching can be made outstanding. We have suggested that it would help if all teachers took the same amount of care to ensure you all get exactly the right amount of support you need to complete tasks.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Alastair Younger

Lead inspector

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