

Courtlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113647
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	338211
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Walters
Headteacher	Lee Earnshaw
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed nine lessons and visited seven teachers. Discussions were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, external support personnel, staff and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school development plan, safeguarding information, curriculum documents, assessment information and pupils' work. There were 28 questionnaires returned by parents and carers. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 and staff completed questionnaires.

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

- Improvements to teaching and the curriculum since the last inspection.
- How well assessment is used to check how well pupils are doing.
- How governors are planning to sustain improvement.

Information about the school

Courtlands is a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and associated behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A small minority have additional needs, mainly autistic spectrum disorders or visual impairment. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. Most pupils are White British. There are many more boys than girls. The new headteacher was appointed in November 2009 and a new Chair of Governors was appointed recently.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. 'My child loves coming to school where she is made to feel part of a special family,' is a typical comment from a parent. They rightly say that their children are well cared for and are safe and secure at school. This is because of the good quality of care, guidance and support that is provided for all groups of pupils, which contributes to their good personal development. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their eagerness to take part in all the activities offered, in their good attendance at school and at the many lunchtime clubs. Pupils behave well because of the school's effective behaviour management strategies, which enable most pupils to manage their feelings and actions.

Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress, due to some exciting additional experiences, such as 'equine therapy', which includes regular visits to a donkey sanctuary, and because their curriculum is well matched to their needs and abilities. All pupils, including those with additional special needs, achieve well in music and art because of specialist provision. The curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is not planned or enriched as well as it could be to meet the variable needs of the pupils or to develop their basic skills systematically as they move through the school. As a result, teachers cannot fully plan to meet the next steps of learning for all groups of pupils. Outdoor learning is not fully embedded in the curriculum although plans are well advanced to do so. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start. They benefit from good quality provision, which helps them to achieve well in most areas of learning. Their outdoor learning area is too small to enable them to have a wide variety of independent experiences, including the use of wheeled toys such as bikes and scooters. Since the last inspection, there has been a period of turbulence with several changes in leadership. As a result, improvement since that time has been fragile. However, leadership is now secure and a new governing body has just been established. New leaders are fully committed to improvement. In the short time that he has been in post, the headteacher has introduced new systems and procedures based on the outcomes of accurate self-evaluation. These are just beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievements and on the quality of the provision. For example, the new assessment and tracking system, though not fully embedded, is beginning to help teachers identify progress and inform the next steps of learning. Support from the behaviour management service has enabled the school to develop good systems to improve behaviour and, as a result, the school environment is a calm and welcoming place in which pupils feel safe. Past inadequacies are being eradicated at a fast pace, showing that there is a satisfactory capacity to continue improving.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the curriculum, particularly for pupils in Years 3 to 6 by:
 - careful planning and building on previous skills to fully meet pupils' personal and academic needs
 - focusing on enriching pupils' learning experiences
 - planning outdoor learning that contributes more fully to pupils' enjoyment.
- Embed the new assessment and tracking procedures fully across the school by:
 - ensuring all staff have a clear view of each pupil's achievements and that they regularly focus on helping pupils to achieve the next steps in learning.
- Improve the outdoor play area for the youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that they have more opportunities to develop their physical skills and make choices about their learning.
- About 40% of the schools' whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

All pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorders or visual impairment, make at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science during their time at the school. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make consistently good progress because provision is well matched to their needs and abilities. In Year 2, for example, pupils achieved well in literacy as they worked with a visitor from a 'Build a Bear' shop in the town. They helped to stuff the bear with great enthusiasm and, because of good questioning by the teacher and the visitor, they learned many new things and showed high levels of enquiry and interest. All pupils make the best progress in music, art and physical education because of some effective additional experiences and therapies. For example, pupils in Year 5 made good progress as they practised a dance to perform at Plymouth Arts Festival. They were helped by an external dance specialist and by some very good modelling from adults as they put together a series of creative and realistic movements.

Most pupils enjoy school and take part in all the activities offered with enthusiasm. A small minority find lessons difficult to cope with but they are well supported by teaching assistants and most behave well and complete the tasks required of them. Because of their emotional and behavioural difficulties, many pupils find it difficult to make friends, share, take turns and work with others. Pupils show good understanding of safety through using simple tools carefully, such as scissors. They understand the importance of eating healthily, with some bringing fruit to school in their packed lunches and others making healthy choices from the dinner menu. They regularly take plenty of exercise. Pupils willingly take on simple responsibilities, such as taking registers to the school office, helping to clear resources away and taking messages. They enjoy singing to the

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elderly in their community. They engage in 'Red Nose Day' and 'Children in Need' and they undertook a special fundraising event, which they organised themselves, for the people of Haiti. Pupils' awareness of other cultures is limited but improving. During the inspection, those in Years 3 to 6 were engaged in a French activity with pupils from several other local schools. They played boules, had a 'French lunch' and learned about life in France. Pupils are appropriately prepared for their future lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

All teachers know their pupils well and manage their classes effectively. These factors contribute to a mostly positive approach to learning and to pupils' good behaviour. In some classes, too little is planned to promote friendship groups and encourage sharing and turn-taking. Limited enrichment of the curriculum in Years 3 to 6 restricts opportunities for joint ventures, shared challenges and opportunities to work together to

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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solve problems. Where such opportunities are planned, pupils make the best progress. In a Year 2 numeracy lesson, for example, strong relationships were evident as pupils worked together to solve problems in a counting activity. Pupils with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully involved in all the activities and benefit from some good additional support. Good questioning is a key feature of the best lessons and helps pupils to extend their skills and encourages them to solve simple problems. The use of assessment is improving, although it is not consistent in all classes. The new assessment system is not fully embedded and, as a result, older pupils, in particular, do not all know their academic targets or what the next steps in their learning are.

The curriculum is under review. It provides some additional exciting activities, such as the recent residential trip to Dartmoor that was really valued by pupils. A good range of visits and visitors enhance learning for all groups. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 benefit from well-planned enriching opportunities based on the model of the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, they make better progress than older pupils. The curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is not planned well enough to meet their wide-ranging needs. Although it is enhanced by therapies, such as art, music and hydrotherapy, it is mainly subject-based so that opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects are rare. The outdoor areas are not used well enough to support learning. Good arrangements for pupils' health, safety and welfare ensure that their personal needs are well met. The school works successfully with outside agencies and this has a positive impact on overall attendance. Induction and transition arrangements with parents and carers are good, and pupils are fully involved in the process.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the school. He has begun to embed initiatives and procedures to take the school forward and is well supported by the deputy headteacher and the new Chair of the Governing Body. Together, they have rigorously evaluated the work of the school and have rightly identified the areas that require improvement. As a result, many new initiatives have been started but have not had time to have an impact on outcomes for pupils. New assessment and tracking procedures show emergent evidence that progress is beginning

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to improve and that teachers are increasingly planning tasks that more closely match pupils' needs. The governing body is newly formed and has only just begun to work in committees. However, it is well aware of its duties and meets its statutory responsibilities satisfactorily. Procedures for safeguarding, including child-protection procedures, are rigorous and fully meet current government requirements. The site is exceptionally safe and secure. Links with parents and carers are good and they are kept well informed about their child's education through regular newsletters and regular meetings. The school promotes equality of opportunity and eliminates discrimination robustly and works rigorously to eliminate the variability of its provision. Leaders have made a positive start in developing a strategy for community cohesion. Local links with schools and other partners are strong, providing some good quality additional provision and experiences for pupils. Community workers have been instrumental in helping to improve the outdoor environment. Links with two schools in other parts of Britain help pupils to understand about living in rural communities. A link with a school in Sierra Leone has recently been established to extend pupils' understanding of the wider world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Reception class make good progress in most areas of learning. Records show that they have improved emotionally during their time in the class. They benefit from sharing their classroom with a few older pupils in Year 1 who provide good role models, particularly for behaviour. Children benefit from good teaching, with a varied range of activities and effective behaviour management. This was evident during the

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inspection when the two teaching assistants rigorously ensured that children contributed to tidying the classroom and completing their tasks before they went out to play. Children really enjoyed dressing up as pirates during the inspection. They responded to the register promptly in 'pirate voices' and made good progress as they counted backwards and forwards to five, anticipating the next number. Levels of support are good and there are many opportunities for children to initiate their own learning in the classroom. The outdoor area is very small and restricts children's opportunities to make choices.

Effective leadership ensures that children are well looked after so that they are safe and secure. Links with parents and carers and with support agencies are good and the local area is used effectively to extend children's knowledge and understanding. Planning is very detailed and is effectively annotated to show which children have achieved the objectives for the lessons. Assessment information is used well to plan the next steps of learning, and annotated 'Learning Journeys' with notes and photographs of past learning provide a clear picture of each child's progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are very supportive of the school and are pleased with the education and care provided. A few parents and carers do not feel that their suggestions and concerns are listened to and a very small minority are concerned about the recent changes to leadership. Leadership has now stabilised and the new governing body visits the school regularly to check that it is running smoothly and to talk to pupils. Several parents and carers commented positively on how well the staff look after their children. 'We are hugely pleased with all the staff, their efforts and their caring attitude,' wrote one parent. Another wrote, 'Staff are extremely supportive. They listen to parents and are excellent with our children.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Courtlands 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 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 72 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	75	6	21	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	86	3	11	1	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	68	7	25	2	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	57	8	29	1	4	2	7
The teaching is good at this school	20	71	6	21	2	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	64	7	25	1	4	1	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	68	8	29	1	4	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)	17	61	5	18	1	4	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	68	6	21	2	7	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	61	8	29	0	0	2	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	64	6	21	1	4	2	7
The school is led and managed effectively	20	71	5	17	2	7	1	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	71	6	21	0	0	2	7

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). 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">■ 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.



25 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Courtlands School, Plymouth, PL6 5JS

Thank you for your help during our recent visit to your school. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out during our visit.

- You enjoy school and most of you come to school regularly. We were pleased to see that you arrive on time.
- You behave well at school.
- You know that it is important to eat healthy food and keep fit.
- You told us that you feel safe at school. We agree with you. The staff keep you safe and secure.
- You work well with other schools and we know that you enjoy singing and dancing for people in your local community.

We are asking your leaders to do three things to help you do even better.

- Improve the curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 so that you have more opportunities to build your skills and so that there are lots of exciting things for you to do. We think the outdoor area could be used more to help your learning.
- Make sure that your work is checked regularly and that teachers help you to move onto the next steps. You could help with this by checking your own work.
- Improve the outside area for the youngest children in the Reception class. You could think of some ideas to help with this.

Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Denise Morris

Lead inspector

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