

Aynsley Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124498
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	340581
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann Prophet
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Hardstaff
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited eight lessons, each taught by a different teacher, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents such as safeguarding policies and records, the school's written plans, samples of pupils' work and assessment information. The responses to staff and pupils' questionnaires were analysed as were the 14 parental questionnaires returned.

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

- the school's work to improve attendance and evidence of its impact
- the steps taken to improve attainment and progress in literacy and their effectiveness
- how well leaders at all levels contribute to improving teaching and learning
- how effectively teaching encourages pupils to be independent learners.

Information about the school

In the past, Aynsley has catered primarily for pupils who have learning difficulties. Increasing numbers have additional behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. In September 2009, its designation was changed and in the future all those admitted will have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Currently, all pupils have moderate, severe or complex learning difficulties. For a small minority, these needs are secondary to their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Several pupils have hearing impairments. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. Most pupils are White British. A very few are in the care of the local authority. The school is no longer designated to admit children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and none has been referred in recent years. The Aynsley Centre is the part of the school that accommodates pupils with particularly complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has gained Healthy Schools Status, Sportsmark and Activemark and has been designated a Change School by Creative Partnerships.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Since its previous inspection, Aynsley has improved significantly on almost all fronts. This has been achieved by strong leadership and staff's shared determination to provide as well as possible for every pupil. Rigorous monitoring and analysis provide leaders with an accurate understanding of what the school does well and where more improvement is needed. Areas of relative weakness are tackled thoughtfully and effectively. For example, as a result of developments in the curriculum, Year 11 pupils now gain a much wider range of accreditation. All this confirms the school's clear capacity to continue to improve.

Pupils make particularly good progress in mathematics and science. Progress tends to be slower in English and pupils often have difficulty mastering reading and writing. Work to refine the curriculum in English has been effective in, for example, focusing attention more closely on developing the skills pupils need for everyday living and the world of work. Pupils do not always have enough opportunities to practise reading and writing through their work in all of the subjects and courses they follow. Leaders' successful work to improve the quality of teaching has achieved consistency in many respects. For instance, teachers make sure that all groups of pupils appreciate just what they are intended to learn by the end of each lesson. From time to time, the most able pupils are not challenged to work at high enough levels and their progress slows down on these occasions.

Pupils explain that they feel safe in school because the adults always look after them. Pastoral support is an especially strong aspect of the school. Staff work in close and effective partnership with a variety of agencies and professionals. This leads, for example, to strong improvement in the behaviour and attendance of individual pupils, including those who have previously been most resistant. The school successfully encourages pupils to take on responsibilities and to contribute to the school and wider community. Crucially, they develop the attitudes and personal skills they need in order to be responsible members of society. An impressive marker of this is that all the Year 11 students who left school in summer 2009 are still in further education, training or employment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rate of pupils' progress in literacy by ensuring that more lessons in all subjects promote reading and writing skills.
 - Ensure that teaching consistently challenges the most able pupils to work at the levels of which they are capable.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils nearly always arrive at lessons ready and willing to work hard. A striking feature of their learning is the ability of most pupils to listen attentively to adults and to each other, showing no signs of impatience when classmates find it difficult to communicate clearly. As a result, pupils throughout the school are confident to speak out, attempt to answer questions and to explain their ideas. Pupils are often equally supportive when working in pairs or small groups, for example, trying hard to be independent when solving problems. They do not always take enough care over their handwriting and presentation.

The school's assessment information and its comparisons with the performance of pupils in similar schools, show that progress is good overall. Pupils at different key stages progress equally well towards their targets and these pose a good degree of challenge. Typically, progress is slowest in English. The accreditation gained by Year 11 pupils is at higher levels in mathematics and science, with GCSE passes in both subjects achieved by over half of those who left in 2009. The large majority of pupils are successful in a variety of accredited courses and this year all have reached the required standard in functional (practical) skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Analyses of data show that groups of pupils such as those with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties or hearing impairment and those from minority ethnic groups or who are looked-after children achieve similarly well when their individual starting points are considered.

Pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties respond gradually to the school's support. Any occurrences of aggressive or disruptive behaviour are usually confined to the Aynsley Centre among pupils who have joined the school relatively recently. The trend in incidents and exclusions is one of steep decline, just as attendance is rising. Records confirm that bullying occurs from time to time. However, pupils report that this is not an issue because they are confident that staff sort things out as soon as they hear about any concerns. Pupils know a good deal about healthy lifestyles. They are particularly keen to take part in physical activity. Improvements in behaviour have allowed pupils to accept more responsibility. Key Stage 3 pupils run a weekly tuck shop, managing a budget, taking orders from staff and pupils, and preparing treats such as Staffordshire oatcakes. Pupils reflect on moral issues such as balancing the rights of adults to smoke with their responsibilities towards children's health. They come to accept differences and to work amicably with those who have other special educational needs and/or disabilities or are from other cultures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Pupils explain that one of the things they like best about the school is that teachers are kind and help them with their work. In fact, the support provided for individuals is one of the strong features of teaching. Teachers, teaching assistants and the communication support workers for pupils with hearing impairment step in quickly when prompting or advice are needed, but encourage pupils to be independent. Lessons are invariably interesting and motivate pupils well. Positive working relationships between staff and pupils, with the judicious use of humour, contribute to the good behaviour evident in most lessons. Usually, work is pitched accurately to enable each group of pupils to take the next step in learning. However, sometimes the most able pupils are not required to achieve the best they can.

The curriculum meets pupils' changing needs as they move up through the school. In the Aynsley Centre, learning programmes are exceptionally flexible. They involve a range of highly relevant community and work-based activities combined, where possible, with courses that support pupils' integration with the main school. During Key Stage 4, college courses and work experience help prepare pupils for moving on. There are some good examples of opportunities for pupils to apply basic skills during various subjects. The school is working to ensure that reading and writing are promoted more consistently in lessons across the curriculum. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about activities that enrich their learning and experiences. They enjoy a variety of relevant visits, including residential. Good opportunities to work with experts in fields such as film-making are supported by the school's many community partnerships.

Each pupil is known very well by leaders and staff. The home-school liaison worker has

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a significant impact on attendance, for example, through working closely with parents and carers and external agencies. A team of clinical psychologists works directly with pupils, for instance, to help them to reflect on their behaviour. After following such a programme, pupils themselves guide others towards making 'the right choice'. Other professionals, such as those specialising in young people's mental health issues, provide valued advice and support, enabling the school to establish tailor-made approaches to meet the needs of individuals. Pupils are supported sensitively when they join the school and receive effective advice to ensure they are prepared well for leaving.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other senior staff provide resolute and knowledgeable leadership. They spearhead the thorough arrangements to evaluate all aspects of the school's work and pupils' performance, using the information gathered in order to drive the school forward. Increasingly, other staff are involved in this work. For example, this year all teachers and teaching assistants have taken part in a programme of observations to help recognise and share good classroom practice. Governors are supportive and well informed. They are currently developing a schedule of formal visits to enable more of them to monitor the school's work at first-hand. When analyses of data suggested that girls in Key Stage 3 were achieving less well than boys, leaders put in place a set of actions designed to rectify the problem. Early signs are that this work, just one example of the school's commitment to equal opportunities, is proving effective. Plans to promote community cohesion are wide-ranging and perceptive. The school is not afraid to tackle sensitive issues manifested within its local community in order to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural society. Safeguarding duties are met satisfactorily and close attention is paid to the welfare of the school's most vulnerable pupils. Plans are well in hand to ensure that all recommended good practice is followed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

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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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The questionnaires returned indicate that parents' views are largely positive, reflecting the findings of the inspection. The school is well aware that some parents are concerned about the possible impact of the change in designation on the outcomes for those pupils who do not have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Leaders welcome discussions about this, or any other topic, and are working hard to ensure that the needs of all pupils continue to be met.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aynsley Special 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 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 98 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	42	10	53	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	53	8	42	1	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	42	10	53	1	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	47	9	47	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	47	10	53	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	32	11	58	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	37	12	63	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)	7	37	10	53	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	32	12	63	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	42	8	42	2	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	32	10	53	3	16	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	37	11	58	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	42	10	53	1	5	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.



31 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aynsley Special School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST11 9HJ

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we inspected your school. Special thanks go to the pupils who talked to us about Aynsley and the Aynsley Centre. They gave us some very useful information.

We agree with those of you who think that yours is a good school. Here are some of the things it does best.

- You all make good progress in your work.
- The oldest pupils pass exams, which often include GCSEs.
- You are prepared well for your lives after you leave school.
- The school does its best to help you behave well and attend school regularly.
- You told us you feel safe and you know that staff look after you.
- You have a great many interesting things to do, so you learn and have fun.
- Your headteacher and all the staff work hard to make sure the school keeps improving.

I have asked the school to do two things in order to get even better.

- Give you plenty of chances to practise reading and writing in all the subjects you learn.
- Make sure those of you who find learning easiest always have work that is hard enough.

I send all the staff and each one of you my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector

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