

The Pines Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103622
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	355413
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Bull
Headteacher	Steven G Tuft
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2008
School address	Dreghorn Road Castle Bromwich Birmingham
Telephone number	0121 464 6136
Fax number	0121 464 3149
Email address	enquiry@pines.bham.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons were observed and thirteen teachers seen. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, governors and staff. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at information about pupils' progress, staff and pupil surveys and safeguarding procedures. The inspectors analysed 66 responses to parents' and carers' questionnaires.

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

- Whether progress and assessment, for more and less able pupils, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding as viewed by the school.
- Whether leadership, at all levels including in the Early Years Foundation Stage continues to drive improvement to an outstanding degree.
- The accommodation and its impact on the learning environment.

Information about the school

The Pines is an average sized special school with a large majority of boys on roll. All pupils have statements of special educational needs, largely for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with a few for complex communication disorders. A very small number of pupils are dual registered with a mainstream school. Pupils belong to a wide range of ethnic groups, predominately White British, Pakistani and Indian. The proportion receiving free school meals is higher than average. The school has several recent awards including the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark and Investors in People. School staff run a substantial outreach service to local schools and act as lead practitioners for the local authority and nationally regarding ASD.

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

The Pines is an outstanding school. High quality teaching and an outstanding curriculum have led to outstanding personal and academic achievements for pupils. This very high quality has been maintained and improved through exceptional focus and skill from school leaders and all staff over several years. School leaders, including exceptionally well involved governors, work ceaselessly to keep abreast of current thinking, and monitor and self-evaluate the quality of their provision. This ensures that pupils receive the very best education and care possible. They look critically at even small areas and regularly identify where improvements can be made. The excellent team work and staff morale ensure that all initiatives are established effectively and standards continue to rise. The capacity to improve is outstanding. Many parents appreciate this high quality; a typical comment being, 'Since attending The Pines my son has come on in leaps and bounds; his progress is remarkable.'

When observing pupils in lessons and around the school their significant and quite specific barriers to learning are not particularly noticeable because the atmosphere is highly social, productive and almost always calm. Pupils' outstanding behaviour and their obvious thirst for knowledge means that lessons usually lead to rapid progress. Progress overall is outstanding because pupils advance through the P scales (very small steps in learning) and national curriculum levels at a much faster rate than their peers in similar settings.

Underpinning this success is a deep understanding by all staff of the way perception and communication develops in pupils with ASD and a concerted focus on developing the tolerance and independence these pupils need for effective learning to take place. The very high level of care, guidance and support ensures that each pupil's individual personal and academic needs are known in detail, and provided for, throughout the day. Challenging personal and academic targets are set and all staff strive to help pupils achieve these during each activity. Exceptionally close work with parents and extensive links with other schools and organisations support the very rich curriculum which is tailored specifically to each pupil. This enables them, for example, to make a valued contribution not only in school, but in the wider community, as in their recent participation in a Welsh National Opera production. Very specifically, pupils are helped to become ambassadors in enabling others to better understand and respect people with ASD. The school is a highly effective lead organisation in this regard.

The school has a welcome learning environment due to the very positive staff and pupil attitudes and caring atmosphere. The school recognises, however, that the fabric and appearance of the building including in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in need of refurbishment. The level of clutter is high, due in part to the awkward spaces and small

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size of the rooms but also to a lack of attention recently. Despite this security is exemplary and pupils are kept extremely safe and behave very safely.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the appearance of the accommodation and environment, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is upgraded to meet the expectations and standards usually associated with the majority of primary schools.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils were busy and keen to learn and regularly asked perceptive questions in lessons. Many expressed a detailed knowledge of their work and were confident to contribute their ideas in class. Their evident enjoyment of learning meant that they were very punctual to lessons. Their broadly average attendance is well above that for similar schools. Attainment is well below average due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties, although a few pupils reach average attainment or above before they move on to mainstream schools. The majority of pupils achieve to an outstanding degree and make at least good and frequently outstanding progress in English, mathematics and science. This is true for all age groups, for boys and girls and for those from different ethnic groups and ensures that all pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. In one lesson pupils began to recognise letters such as 'a' and 't' and quite quickly learned to identify which words began with them. Those with the most severe communication difficulties usually progressed rapidly through the early P scales due to the significant specialist skills of all staff. The school has identified that a small number of pupils, moving from P scales on to national curriculum levels, sometimes struggle with developing the language of the more advanced concepts involved. The necessary vocabulary is now being introduced at an earlier stage to facilitate this transition. A majority of more able pupils progress at least as fast as their mainstream peers.

The most noticeable element of pupils' personal development is their increasing independence and social skills. On the playground many co-operate happily and in lessons several seek out others to share their ideas or show their work. Pupils show care and consideration towards each other and towards those who are different. Respect for the environment is epitomised by the excellent adherence to school routines and very keen recycling activities. Pupils' very strong spiritual awareness is exemplified by their deep sense of appreciation of the world around them. This all represents outstanding progress overall in overcoming significant barriers to learning.

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	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is outstanding because it leads to such rapid learning in the majority of lessons, for all pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants show high levels of skill in enabling pupils to focus on their work and try hard. This is achieved through expert use of various communication strategies and warm, supportive relationships which accommodate the pupils' various and complex needs. Staff make sure that every subject helps pupils to build upon core skills such as literacy, numeracy or information and communication technology (ICT). In addition assessment is very thorough and all lessons are planned to take each individual's learning forward quickly. Pupils' learning is checked regularly throughout the lesson and work is often adapted where necessary. High expectations mean that lessons are stimulating and always challenge pupils to achieve more. Very occasionally, pupils are expected to sit for too long or the pace is slow at the beginning of a lesson.

Excellence in approaches to autism results in a rapid increase in pupils' communication skills and social interaction. In addition, a very rich range of curriculum experiences and outstanding care and support lead to pupils being able to increasingly cope with the everyday world and overcome their difficulties in meeting new situations. This is reflected in the thorough way transitions from class to class or on to other schools are managed. This approach to helping pupils cope with new experiences is very evident in the dining room, where all staff continue to encourage pupils to try new foods and adapt to the demands of communal living. Every effort is made to enable pupils to take plenty of exercise and make good healthy food choices which they respond to increasingly well. The school recognises that the appearance of the accommodation to support the

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learning environment is not well appointed and is poised to begin addressing this. Pupils, nevertheless, are very appreciative of the secure, stimulating environment created for them whereby they can explore and develop towards a bright future. As one explained, 'as we get good quality support right from Reception, when we get to our age (10) it helps us to manage the autism better.'

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?

School leadership, including governance is outstanding in creating ambition in every member of staff to maintain very high standards and provide the best for each and every pupil. Excellent team work is evident everywhere, from lessons and activities to the highly effective team approach to school improvement. This is based on rigorous monitoring of all aspects of the school's work and its impact on pupils' learning and well-being. The school obtains as much information as possible to compare their rates of progress, with other similar schools and with mainstream, in order to aim high. Whole school targets, based upon challenging expectations, are regularly met and often exceeded. Regular staff development is a key factor in maintaining such high levels of skill amongst the staff. Senior staff are critically evaluative, which is why, not only has outstanding progress been maintained, but improvements are also evident. For example in science attainment has risen recently as a result of actions taken by the subject leader.

High quality, extensive partnerships with other schools and organisations ensure that no opportunity or link is missed which may be of benefit to the pupils. These links are facilitated by the school's highly regarded outreach role within the local authority. Very close work with parents, to help them support the personal and academic progress pupils are making, is outstanding. A completely individualised approach ensures that regardless of ability or circumstances pupils have outstanding equal opportunities and there is no evidence of any discrimination. Safeguarding procedures are of very high quality reflecting the outstanding approach taken to putting pupils first and ensuring that their well-being is at the heart of every action taken. The good promotion of community cohesion locally and nationally is at the forefront of integrating people with autism into mainstream society and encouraging acceptance and respect for their differences. The school is at the early stages of making international links to further support this work.

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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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children have a carefully controlled entry to Nursery and Reception, involving detailed work with parents, which enables them to settle very well and begin the important process of learning the routines and how to communicate. By the time they leave Reception, children are much more able to communicate their needs, they have become more independent, can listen more readily and better choose what they want to do. Very strong staff teamwork, means that careful planning is effectively put into practice, consistently, with each individual child, and teaching and learning are outstanding. The level of trust between children and staff was remarkable in one library session in allowing children to develop the unfamiliar skills of listening through headphones in a safe atmosphere. The emphasis on communication adaptation is key to the success of this work, as is very careful and accurate assessment which is used to determine what each child needs to learn next. Children are given plenty of time to work things out for themselves which strengthens their ability to think and work so well.

The excellent curriculum includes a wealth of imaginative activities. In one outstanding lesson, children tried on boots and a space helmet from their story and excitedly climbed into a 'spaceship' showing rapid language development. The school recognises, however, that the visual environment lacks the quality usually associated with Early Years Foundation Stage. Excellent leadership has recently led to significant improvements in the way children apply their numeracy skills. Regular, effective self-evaluation ensures that all staff clearly understand how to maintain such very high standards and keep improving outcomes.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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

Views of parents and carers

A high number of responses show that parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the excellent quality of care and education that their children receive. They particularly like how well their children are kept safe and the information provided on the progress being made. No major concerns were expressed, with the exception of the amount of speech therapy provided which is beyond the control of the school. Comments typical of many, and supported by inspection findings, include, 'We feel that this school is excellent with strong leadership and extremely good teachers who are dedicated to the children.' And 'The Pines' not only fulfils the purpose of education but also the expression of pure and simple good hearted kindness ... from all members of staff.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Pines 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 84 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	67	22	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	54	82	12	18	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	49	74	17	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	39	59	26	39	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	47	71	18	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	62	24	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	61	26	39	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)	37	56	27	41	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	42	64	23	35	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	59	24	36	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	59	24	36	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	43	65	20	30	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	49	74	17	26	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



23 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Pines Special School, Birmingham, B36 8LL

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons. Yours is an outstanding school with many interesting things going on, just as you described. School leaders work very hard to keep developing the school and, for this reason, your work continues to be of very high quality and is improving all the time. Highly skilful teaching helps you to make outstanding progress and do very well in all your subjects. We like the way you really enjoy your learning and always try to do your best. You told us that your teachers are very caring and always listen to you. They are especially skilled at helping you to manage your autism and so helping you to develop your personal skills as well as possible. Although you have many interesting things to do, we think that the appearance of the school lacks attention and so we have asked the school to improve the decoration and the way the inside of the building is organised. You can all help by sharing your ideas with your teachers about how this could be done.

You show a very mature attitude to taking on responsibility and contribute exceptionally well to school life and the community. You were keen to tell us that the school keeps you extremely safe and looks after you very well. It is especially impressive to see just how exceptionally well you behave, particularly in the way you value learning so much and like to share your ideas in lessons. We also like the way you are very kind to one another, especially on the playground. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Pothecary

Lead inspector

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