



The Old Park School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103880
LEA Dudley
Inspection number 282895
Inspection dates 21 November 2005 to 22 November 2005
Reporting inspector Janet Thompson HMIHMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special	School address	Corbyn Road
School category	Community special		Russells Hall Estate
Age range of pupils	3 to 19		Dudley, West Midlands DY1 2JZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 818905
Number on roll	125	Fax number	01384 818906
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Rita Tonks
Date of previous inspection	19 October 1998	Headteacher	Mrs Gill Cartwright

Age group 3 to 19	Inspection dates 21 November 2005 - 22 November 2005	Inspection number 282895
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This all-age school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties as well as those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. A number of pupils also have Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Just over two thirds of the pupils are White British and a little more than a fifth of pupils do not use English as their first language. There are 34 pupils in the sixth form and currently only one pupil in the Foundation Stage. The school is currently involved in the reorganisation of special schools in Dudley. The Old Park School is due to be purpose-built in a new location, with a completion date set for September 2008. When the school was inspected in March 2004, it was deemed to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Old Park is a good school and is very well placed to improve further. This is a more positive picture than the school's own evaluation. The reasons for this are linked to the very good progress made as a result of the hard work and dedication of the staff since the last monitoring visit. Whilst achievement in the last academic year was satisfactory, inspectors found considerable improvement in the progress made by pupils this term. As a direct result of high quality interventions by the senior management team, teaching has improved, significantly. Trends in achievement are continuing to rise and progress in lessons is good. Pupils enjoy being in school but there are still too many who do not attend regularly enough. Pupils also make good progress in their personal development and there are some outstanding examples of social relationships between pupils. They have a very good knowledge about their own targets and are keen to find out other people's targets, including those of the inspectors!

Other improvements in provision have been well established and the curriculum provides relevant experiences for all pupils. The impact of using literacy and communication across the curriculum is good. However, the influence of numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is not as widespread. Care offered to pupils is well judged to help meet their needs while encouraging greater independence.

The very able headteacher and deputy have improved the school by tackling all the issues raised in the last inspection and establishing very effective coaching to help improve lessons. They have a good knowledge of strengths and areas for development across the school, although at times the information gathered could be used more efficiently. Many of the areas for further development have already been identified in the school's plans for improvement. The leadership team are very well supported by an effective team, including staff and governors, who are keen to continue the good progress made since the last inspection. The school provides good value for money.

The school consults pupils, parents and other professionals regularly. Inspectors found that the majority of parents are happy with the provision. Many are particularly pleased with the recent improvements in the school that have helped the pupils make more progress. The school is responsive to any comments made by parents and has recently made parents' evenings more focused on the targets for pupils.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Progress made by students in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving: many students make good progress. The curriculum, supported by good communication, offers opportunities for more students to increase their pace of learning. Students have a good knowledge of their targets and work hard to achieve them. The curriculum is very well developed to provide age-appropriate activities that help students prepare for their future lives effectively. There is a good range of accreditation that gives students external qualifications and they take great pride in these.

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate the increased rates of progress by continuing to raise the quality of teaching so that all teachers are able to use the strategies seen in the best lessons.
- Develop the use of ICT, numeracy and PSHCE targets to inform planning in other subjects.
- Continue to improve attendance for identified individuals by analysing patterns and establishing effective intervention.
- Critically review available information in order to identify and use that which is most helpful in evaluating the impact of strategies on the pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Over the last academic year, pupils made satisfactory progress overall. In some phases many pupils made good or better progress; this was particularly the case in Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics.

Achievement over the last term has improved considerably and pupils are now making good progress across the school. Many more pupils are able to apply skills and concepts themselves in a wide variety of situations. The senior management team monitor how well targets are matched to pupils' previous learning. The final targets set provide a good level of challenge. The progress made in lessons is good and pupils are able to recognise the achievements they have made in relation to their targets. Individual education plans provide relevant targets although some, for example relating to social skills, are not always written in a way that helps teachers to make a clear judgement of progress. However, progress in these additional areas of the curriculum is good.

The school analyses progress made by different groups of pupils. The differences identified between groups directly relate to their learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, for example, take longer to improve their social skills. Whilst this can be expected, the school is diligent in

ensuring it retain high expectations regarding the levels of progress made. The school has rightly identified the need to establish criteria for good progress in relation to different groups.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

Pupils respond well to opportunities for their personal development. The importance placed on effective communication enables pupils to develop appropriate and supportive relationships with one another, as well as to show their feelings and preferences. In lessons and at other times, they show growing confidence in those things that they can do by themselves. They cooperate well and engage in lively communication, including adolescent humour and chatting, about the latest 'soap' episode. Pupils understand the boundaries that staff set for them and as a result they make choices that help them stay safe and look after one another. They respond very well to opportunities for spiritual and moral development through excellent assemblies and there are regular timetabled opportunities for reflection on their own achievements and responsibilities. Opportunities for cultural development through the curriculum are good.

Consistent strategies and rewards contribute to very good behaviour by the majority of pupils and for those requiring more support, there are effective systems in place. More rigorous evaluation will further develop those strategies that work best.

Many of the more able pupils show an awareness of healthy choices at lunch and break times. The PSHCE programme enables pupils to practise life skills within the community. This includes work on recycling at home, how to use money at the local supermarket and for older pupils, work or college placements.

The school council is beginning to enable all pupils to have opportunities to say what they like and things that they want to change. Representatives voice their opinions with enthusiasm and talk about how to make rules and decisions.

Many students enjoy their learning, as is shown by their enthusiasm, active participation in lessons and pleasure in their successes. They are happy to come to school, settle to known routines quickly and have good relationships with staff. Attendance is unsatisfactory, but the strategies put in place have made significant improvements for identified pupils with the lowest attendance.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good overall. A very good coaching and mentoring system has helped

the school to improve lessons so that all teaching is at least satisfactory and the majority is good or better. Pupils are highly motivated by their learning and take pride in their own achievements and those of their classmates. They are keen to tell visitors about their progress and have a very good knowledge of their own targets. In the best lessons, teachers use the assessment of pupils' achievement effectively to inform planning. They clearly communicate what is going to be learnt to the pupils who then have a good understanding of expectations for behaviour and learning. With all this in place, the teacher, provides well targeted work carefully designed to offer sufficient challenge and reinforce prior learning for each pupil. Moderation of assessment has helped to improve the teachers' understanding about levels of achievement across the subject areas. Active participation is expected from pupils, thus helping to maintain a good pace. Very good communication systems underpin effective teaching throughout the school. Seamless and highly effective team work further help to maximise learning opportunities. In the best lessons, the support given to pupils is carefully managed to ensure there are sufficient opportunities for some independent learning, and the pupils frequently rise to this challenge.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant. It meets the needs of all learners and contributes well to their ability to stay safe and healthy. The arrangements for older pupils have benefited particularly from well focused developments, especially in relation to preparing young people for their life after school. These include experience of the world of work and attendance at local colleges that lead to full time course placements for some pupils. The school has done well to integrate literacy and communication skills effectively across the curriculum, but still has some work to do to fully incorporate numeracy, ICT and PSHCE in its daily planning for other subjects.

The curriculum is enriched with a wide range of educational trips and well planned activities, such as sports and arts days, which often incorporate the support of visiting artists and musicians. A small number of pupils have had the opportunity to participate in adventurous outdoor activities, such as the 'Kids around Britain' sailing expedition, and plans are in place to re-establish a strong tradition of regular residential experiences.

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support

Care, guidance and support for pupils are good. Staff know the pupils well and use this information to set targets for the next steps in their learning. The use of age-appropriate resources strengthens the curriculum and sensitive behaviour management enables pupils to focus on learning. Behaviour support plans are beginning to have a significant effect on the way in which the pupils manage their own behaviour. Fixed-term exclusions are being used effectively to establish support. There are good examples of pupils returning to school successfully and fully participating in the curriculum through well targeted support. Correct procedures are followed for safeguarding pupils but the written policy does not reflect current government guidance. All pupils benefit from the school's good partnerships with parents, carers and outside agencies.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and her deputy have worked in a dynamic partnership over the past five terms to bring the school out of special measures. They have been helped and encouraged throughout this time by a very supportive governing body. Recent developments have created an extended leadership group whose members are already making a significant contribution to the continuing improvement of the school. Subject leaders are also having a growing impact on the development of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning and oversight of pupils' achievements and progress. Consequently, the thriving whole-staff team works well together to achieve the very clearly expressed mission statement and aims of the school. Very good management of staff difficulties, recruitment and induction of new staff and very well planned and delivered training have assured this continuous improvement.

The school knows itself well and is dedicated to ensuring all pupils receive the best possible opportunities for learning. Rigorous and effectively targeted intervention has resulted in the significant improvements that have been made, for example to the quality of teaching. Good school improvement planning processes take into account the views of the whole school community, including parents, in setting challenging but deliverable targets for ongoing development of the school's work. These approaches do not always result in the considerable amount of information that is gained from monitoring activities being used to best effect. There are some good examples of this information being carefully and thoughtfully analysed, but this aspect requires more development work. Governors also need to refine their monitoring role, so that they can continue to challenge the school to raise its effectiveness more confidently on the basis of its own knowledge.

Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The Pupils The Old Park School Corbyn Road Russells Hall Estate Dudley West Midlands DY1 2JZ

5 December 2005

Dear Pupils

Thank you for your help during the inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you all and seeing you work hard. We think you go to a good school.

- Teachers give you targets that help you learn more. You all know your targets and you are working hard to achieve them
- Teachers plan interesting lessons and you are enthusiastic about your learning
- Most of you behave very well and those of you who find this difficult are trying hard to improve
- Your school council is good at helping you all to make your school better.
- It was very good to see so many of you using signs and symbols to communicate with each other and with adults around you
- We think the staff and governors at your school have worked very hard to make it a good school.

We have asked the staff to work with you to make the school even better:

- We would like all your lessons to be very interesting and for you to use ICT and your maths skills in more subjects
- Some of you do not come to school as often as you could and we would like you and your parents to work with the school to help you come more regularly
- There is lots of information about how well you are learning and we would like you and your school to make sure it is all used well.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson HMI (On behalf of the inspection team)