

Pens Meadow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103883
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	336183
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ivan Dalloway
Headteacher	Marie Bissell
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2006
School address	Ridge Hill Brierley Hill Road Wordsley
Telephone number	01384 818945
Fax number	01384 818946
Email address	mbissell@pens-meadow.dudley.sch.uk

Age group	3–19
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2010
Inspection number	336183

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors looked at classroom teaching and other learning activities in the school. Twelve lessons and six teachers were observed. Meetings were held with staff, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Various documents including the school's development plan and extensive safeguarding policies were scrutinised. Twenty four parental and carer questionnaires were received.

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

- how effectively the school uses assessment data to bring about improvements
- how well the school measures the small steps of progress for those pupils who increasingly have complex learning needs
- how well pupils' spiritual and cultural development are promoted.

Information about the school

Pens Meadow School is an all-age special school for pupils with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties. Pupils start the school at various times throughout the school year. Approximately one third of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties and nearly one third of pupils have some form of autistic spectrum disorder. Seven looked after children are on the school roll. Approximately one third of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school is situated on a primary care trust campus. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2008.

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

Pens Meadow is a good school. It has some outstanding features. Its work with parents and families is exceptionally strong. Families and school work in close collaboration for the benefit of all pupils. Parents rightly hold the school in high regard. One parent commented, 'I could not wish for a better school, for my son. He looks forward to going and I have peace of mind that he is safe, looked after and learning to play with others.' The school has good links with other schools, colleges and the local community; this does much to increase pupils' experiences and enjoyment of learning and helps to prepare them well for life in the wider community. The care, support and guidance provided for pupils are outstanding. Staff know their pupils exceptionally well and are skilled at getting the best out of them. There are examples where the school has worked very closely with the local social services department, parents and foster parents, resulting in pupils developing a healthier lifestyle, improving behaviour and increasing academic progress. Every pupil is valued and respected as a unique individual and no stone is left unturned, so that progress can be maximised. However, accommodation, although improved from the time of the last inspection, still limits pupils' learning and opportunities. For example, lack of space means that pupils with autism have too few quiet areas where they can work or calm down, and makes it more difficult to manage the needs of those pupils with physical disabilities.

Standards are very low, reflecting pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, they make good progress in achieving their individual learning objectives. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have extremely complex learning needs. Pupils settle quickly into school and get off to a good start in their learning. This is consistently built upon throughout the school. At post-16, pupils are confident communicators, more independent and are well prepared for the future. Teaching is consistently good and there are pockets of outstanding teaching. High quality teaching is the key to securing pupils' good progress and the total-communication approach of using signs, symbols, photographs and objects of reference, enables pupils to make good gains in their communication skills. On occasions, there are missed opportunities to maximise pupils' independence in lessons.

Despite uncertainties over the future role of the school, this has not detracted the headteacher from securing ongoing improvements. She provides outstanding leadership and management and sets high expectations at all levels; ensuring a clear focus on promoting pupils' well being and educational progress. The collective commitment of staff and governors is evident and the school provides a warm and positive learning climate, where pupils feel comfortable, safe and confident. The capacity to improve is good. The headteacher and senior leaders have a well-grounded understanding of the

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

strengths and areas for development of the school. This has resulted in significant improvements to key aspects of the school's work and performance since the last inspection. Analysis of pupils' progress data is detailed and thorough and this triggers effective action to raise achievement. Assessment data is beginning to be used increasingly to measure pupils' progress against similar pupils nationally; this is beginning to bring greater challenge and rigour.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to provide more space in classrooms for pupils with physical disabilities and improve accommodation to better suit the needs of those pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.
- Where appropriate, increase opportunities for pupils' independent learning in lessons by making them less reliant on adult support.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

In lessons pupils are enthusiastic and determined learners. They make good academic and personal progress and most achieve well. All the different groups of pupils achieve equally well, although for a few pupils, whose attendance is affected by severe medical needs or for extended visits to Pakistan, progress is satisfactory. However, all pupils enjoy school, they feel very safe and are eager to participate as much as possible in learning. Pupils' achievements are good in communicating their needs, through a variety of methods. Pupils also achieve well in areas of information and communication technology, music, personal and health education. Careful attention is given to helping all pupils to overcome their barriers to learning, such as communication or behaviour and this helps them to interact more effectively with others. For those pupils who are operating at extremely early developmental levels, their progress is carefully measured and they learn how to transfer and re-enforce their skills such as engaging in eye-contact in different situations or with different people. The majority of pupils with severe learning difficulties have the confidence, by the time they are ready to leave school, to learn to travel independently and purchase items from shops.

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by sensory experiences which elicit enjoyment; this includes participation in dance and music activities from a wide range of cultures and visits to other places of worship. Pupils' make a good contribution to the wider community, which is encouraged through enterprise projects and fundraising activities for charities. The recently formed school council is providing pupils with opportunities to make suggestions and decisions for improvements to school life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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	1
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Pupils clearly enjoy lessons and work hard to achieve. Teaching is lively and imaginative. Teachers' skilled use of sensory based approaches to stimulate pupils' interests is a particular strength. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties visually track light sources in the white room. Pupils respond well to stories that are brought alive by the use of tactile objects. They move to the rhythm of Bhangra drumming sessions with pleasure and laughter. Music, singing and rhymes are often used to good effect to engage pupils' attention and motivation. Teachers use a good range of specialist strategies to develop pupils' communication skills. Pupils who have autism have highly structured timetables and symbols are used effectively to increase their understanding and communication. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptional and teachers' secure knowledge of pupils is used to good effect. Learning is highly personalised and tailored to meet individual needs and prepare them well for the future. For example, older pupils learn how to develop important social skills such as eating out in public places. Occasionally, the opportunities for pupils to learn from their mistakes and to initiate activities are too restricted. The use of assessment has been improved since the last inspection and pupils' progress is carefully tracked across all subjects and used well to inform teachers' planning.

The good curriculum meets the wide range of pupils' needs well. However, despite the

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.

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

best efforts of the headteacher to improve the accommodation, the lack of space and specialist facilities restricts some elements of the curriculum, such as science and does not allow easy management of those pupils who have challenging behaviour and need separate quiet areas to work in. At times, this can lead to other pupils' learning being disrupted. A hydro-therapy pool and a sensory room have been created but these are small, as are many of the classrooms and lack sufficient storage space for pupils' specialised mobility equipment; this results in cramped classrooms. The school has done what it can to limit the impact of the accommodation upon the curriculum.

The outstanding care, support and guidance provided to pupils is a major factor in developing pupils' enjoyment of learning. Very strong links with families and a range of partners such as health and education professionals help pupils to be more receptive to learning. The school successfully creates a supportive and caring environment, which promotes the confidence of pupils. At all stages of their school life, pupils are supported exceptionally well to help their transition to the next step successfully.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides confident leadership and inspires the support of both staff and parents. She has developed a strong sense of purpose for the school, which is widely shared and adhered to by staff and governors. This drive focuses on maximising the potential of every child. Assessment data is used perceptively to maximise pupils' progress. It has been used to check that all pupils, whatever their background or disability, achieve as well as possible. The strength of the analysis is in its use to detect individual under performance and implement strategies to address these issues quickly and effectively. The monitoring of teaching and learning across the school is rigorous and helpful feedback is given to staff to help them improve their practice. The school's self-evaluation is at times too cautious. However, thorough self-analysis leads to perceptive and well judged actions.

The governing body is supportive and committed to securing the future of the school. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and development areas of the school through regular class visits. They are well-informed and are actively involved in strategic decision making. They hold the school to account effectively.

Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and risks are carefully assessed, although fire drills are not always accurately recorded. An emphasis on promoting tolerance and

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

respect underpins much of the school's work. The school is a harmonious community, where everyone is respected and valued equally. The promotion of community cohesion is good. Pupils have good opportunities to be involved in the local community such as mixing with other pupils in a range of schools and accessing facilities in the local community to support learning. Visits from a wide range of different cultural groups are actively and successfully encouraged.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from low starting points. Children settle in well and are happy because staff are caring and value them, ensuring they are safe. Children's personal, social and emotional development is good because staff create warm, positive relationships. Staff promote children's self-confidence through praise and celebration of their achievements. Given their range of needs, children behave well and are developing important skills, such as feeding themselves at lunchtime. Stimulating activities are provided both indoors and outdoors, across the different areas of learning. For example, children enjoy playing outside and learning to share equipment and enjoy copying shapes when seated at the table in class. Leadership and management are good. The planning, recording and assessment of tasks is meticulous, so children's progress is carefully monitored. Partnerships with parents and external agencies are excellent and contribute to the good progress children make.

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

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

Sixth form

Post-16 students make good progress because their achievements are tracked diligently. They benefit from good quality and highly skilled teaching, which helps them to develop into mature and confident young people. Students make a strong contribution to the life of the school and wider community, through volunteer and work-related programmes. They develop a greater sense of responsibility and maturity. For example, they have been actively involved in the decisions over refurbishing one of their rooms. Teaching activities are well matched to the full range of complex learning needs. The sixth form provision is well led and managed and the group is often split, to better meet individual needs. Students access college courses and mix more widely with other peers, which helps to promote their social development. Vocational accreditation opportunities are good and these courses promote students' involvement in their learning well. They show a pride in their work and results. They are prepared effectively for the future, through community visits and advice from the Connexions service. Excellent relationships and the key worker system support students very well in overcoming barriers to learning.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Approximately half the parents returned parent questionnaires. Parents and carers are supportive and delighted with the care and education their children receive. There were numerous supportive comments, indicating both the appreciation and high regard for the work of the school. A typical comment was, 'The school has a caring environment with good teaching staff, excellent classroom assistants and has a very positive ethos'. Inspectors found that the school works very closely with parents and carers and rightly

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

views this partnership as an important aspect of its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pens Meadow 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 inspector received 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 57 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	79	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	84	2	11	1	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	74	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	79	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	74	5	26	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)	13	68	5	26	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	84	3	16	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	74	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	68	6	32	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	84	3	16	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 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.



22 March 2010

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Pens Meadow School, Wordsley, DY8 5ST

I enjoyed my visit to your school and meeting with the school council. It is clear to me how much you like school and the exciting activities that you are involved in such as the Bhangra dancing. Your school is a good school and all the staff and governors are working hard to make the school a happy and vibrant place to be.

You are looked after outstandingly well and this helps you to do your best. You feel safe and comfortable at school and you get on well with all your members of staff, who know you well and how to get the best out of you. You receive good teaching, which is lively and imaginative. This means that your lessons are interesting and help many of you make good progress towards reaching your individual targets. You are able to follow a good range of subjects and courses. I liked the fact that you have plentiful opportunities to go on trips, mix with other pupils in different schools and for older students, that you can attend colleges.

Your headteacher has done a good job in leading your school and helping to make it better. She does this with the help of all staff and the teamwork that everyone shows in school is excellent.

In order to make your school even better, I have asked the people who are responsible for running your school to do two things. The first is, to see if they can make your building better, so that you have more space and rooms to work in, with some quieter areas. The second is that, where possible, staff give you even more opportunities to learn independently.

You can help to improve your school by continuing to enjoy school and trying your best. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Price

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.