

Pens Meadow School

Ridge Hill, Brierley Hill Road, Stourbridge, DY8 5ST

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in communication because teachers are highly skilled in enabling them to make their needs known using gesture, signs, pictures and switches.
- Parents are delighted with the way in which the school supports them in helping their children to develop improved sleeping and feeding patterns. They say, 'These are the things that improve family life'.
- Pupils develop good life skills such as using a picture shopping list to select groceries from the shelves in a supermarket and travelling on a bus independently.
- Progress in writing and mathematics is good because these are taught well.
- Progress in reading is outstanding because each pupil has a highly individualised reading programme.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress because they begin to move with increased independence and communicate choices about what they want to do.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well and gain the qualifications they need to join suitable college courses when they leave.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are adept at assessing risks and keeping themselves safe.
- The intimate care needs of pupils are met with dignity.
- Senior leaders, including governors, are meticulous in checking the quality of teaching and provide extensive ongoing training of teachers. This enables teachers to eradicate obstacles to learning for pupils, thus raising their achievement and supporting school improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, teachers do not provide enough challenge for pupils in lessons and this slows their development and/or learning.
- In a few classes, not enough is done to promote the independence of every pupil.
- Sometimes, during one-to-one hydrotherapy sessions and also in a few lessons, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' numeracy skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed nine lessons (including a hydrotherapy session) taught by six different teachers and three teaching assistants. Three of these lessons and a hydrotherapy session were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors heard pupils read from different disability and special educational needs groups. They looked at their written work and 'Learning Journeys', which are the records showing the development of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, when observing lessons.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, the Chair of Governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, statements of special educational needs, individual educational plans, personal education plans, feeding plans, the reading scheme, the school's improvement plan, monitoring information, the appraisal policy, all safeguarding documents and minutes of governing body minutes. Inspectors examined 28 Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- There were 12 responses to the online questionnaires (Parent View) at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors, along with the views of parents and grandparents who came into the school during the inspection to meet with the lead inspector.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Lawley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school makes provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils with severe learning difficulties also have autistic spectrum disorders. Some pupils have very complex medical needs and a few have visual and/or hearing impairment. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The number of pupils has increased since the previous inspection and the needs of the pupils have become more complex.
- The school makes use of alternative provision: use is made of a local farm to develop pupils' work-related skills and vocational courses are provided at Dudley and Halesowen Colleges. A few students take a food technology course Level 1 at Dudley College. Similarly, a few students take a catering Level 1 course and a horticulture course (NCFE) at Halesowen College.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those from families where English is an additional language, are above average. These pupils are represented across all of the different disability and special educational needs groups in the school.
- An above average proportion of pupils are eligible for premium funding, which is extra government funding for pupils looked after by the local authority and known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school is located on a rented site.
- With the help of the local authority the school has submitted a bid to the Department of Education for a grant to re-furbish a disused building located on the site. There is a plan to re-furbish this building so as to improve the 14-19 accommodation and enhance further the provision to develop students' independent life skills.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that pupils are challenged consistently through all activities in lessons so as to speed up their personal development and academic learning
 - taking every opportunity in all lessons to maximise the development of all pupils' skills in doing things for themselves (as far as possible).
- Improve pupils' development of numeracy skills by:
 - ensuring that the school's leaders implement an agreed numeracy programme that is delivered through all subjects and therapy sessions to promote these skills successfully.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with exceptionally complex needs. Often they are unable to communicate and struggle to move freely. Speedily, they make outstanding progress in communication and movement because of the high quality support they receive.
- Many examples of pupils' very effective communication skills were seen. One, with help, moved his head to say, 'I have had enough'. Another made use of two pictures to communicate a choice at snack time. Yet another gained attention through eye contact. As pupils recognise that their hands are a part of their body they begin to use them. Supported by hand massage, they begin to squeeze and/or attempt to grasp objects. A few reach out to use switches to respond to questions. As they push with their feet they begin, in certain positions, to initiate movement.
- Measured from their various starting points, students in the sixth form make good progress in English and mathematics. They learn to tell the time and read pictorial instructions to follow a simple recipe when cooking. All gain good work-related skills. Almost all gain an Entry Level 1 qualification in 'Personal Progress' (an Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network qualification) that enables them to go to college when they leave school.
- The few Year 11 and sixth form students following catering and horticulture courses at college achieve well and gain Level 1 qualifications
- Throughout Key Stages 1 to 4, pupils whatever their disability or special educational needs make good progress in writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in reading is outstanding. Specialist equipment and careful positioning enable pupils with hearing and sight impairment to achieve as well as their classmates.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties anticipate what is going to happen when a puppet is held close to their face during sensory story time. Pupils with severe learning difficulties demonstrate their understanding of story books as they point accurately to the correct symbol or picture when asked a question. The most able pupils read simple texts demonstrating that they have the skill to sound out unfamiliar words accurately.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties find writing difficult. However, with fingers rubbed and hands stretched to improve their flexibility, they begin to make marks in a sand tray (thus experiencing writing). Pupils with severe learning difficulties access switches to operate symbol and word programs on computers and make good progress in writing interesting stories (sequencing the events in their stories well). The most able pupils, using a pencil, write simple sentences spelling words and using punctuation with reasonable accuracy.
- Pupils' mathematical development builds step-by-step whatever their ability or needs. The most-able pupils use money and know that they must wait at the till in a supermarket for change (they are always shadowed by an adult in the background during such experiences). All experience mathematics, such as when pupils with some of the most complex needs experience numbers being counted out loudly by their teacher while they bounce on the trampoline. A few pupils are able to work with numbers up to 100, understand how to weigh small amounts and estimate the size of an object.
- A few pupils with complex medical conditions slip backwards. Everything is done to help these pupils maintain as good muscle tone and body control as possible and so achieve as much as

they can. Individual hydrotherapy sessions, based on physiotherapist advice, support these pupils exceptionally well.

- Opportunities to promote pupils' communication skills are never missed across all subjects and therapy sessions. This is not consistently so with numeracy. For example, in a one-to-one hydrotherapy session an opportunity was missed to explore 'taller than' and during a lesson in the sensory room (a specialist room with lights and music) opportunities were missed to encourage pupils to track a straight line of light with their eyes (an important mathematical development for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties).
- Pupils make good progress towards their non-academic targets such as improving their independence in feeding and establishing better sleep patterns. Parents are delighted when their children can operate a toaster and boil a kettle safely and independently when at home.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those from families who speak English as an additional language, are treated as individuals and receive support based on all of their needs. They make the same good progress as other pupils.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to raise the rate of progress for children looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals. For example, it is used to purchase electronic communication aids and Ipads for children looked after by the local authority so that their foster parents and/or carers can support them with their learning at home in the same way as they are supported at school. Consequently, these pupils are supported in overcoming obstacles to their learning and achieve as well as their peers in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is good. There are pockets of outstanding teaching in English and through structured hydrotherapy sessions. The teaching of reading is outstanding throughout the school. Each pupil has a tailored personal reading plan that is implemented with rigour. Consequently, all pupils take off with their reading.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is consistently outstanding. Throughout Years 14 to 19 (the model used for teaching sixth form students) it is consistently good. There is no difference in the quality of teaching of different disability groups throughout the school.
- There is some inspirational teaching. Such teaching was observed in the sensory room for children (Early Years Foundation Stage) with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Each child had a specific identified learning outcome planned to speed up his/her personal development and/or next important learning step. Activities were planned to enable these outcomes to be reached; relationships and teamwork between all four adults in the room were outstanding; the room provided rich sensory stimulation through piped music, optic fibres and vibrant colours. Each pupil exceeded expectation: one tracked an object with his eyes; another grasped an object with her hands; another moved his neck demonstrating anticipation; and all communicated highly successfully.
- Typically, teaching is characterised by high expectations. Questions are used effectively to deepen pupils' learning. Although the pace of teaching is brisk pupils are given sufficient time to

process information and enabled to respond using the method most comfortable to them.

- Occasionally, opportunities are missed to challenge pupils. For example, a lesson for pupils with complex autistic spectrum disorders successfully helped them with their development of social imagination skills (getting along with each other), but did not develop their individual physical development needs.
- In a few lessons, insufficient attention is given to promoting the independence skills of every pupil in the class. For example, during a snack time session not enough was done to encourage a few pupils to work towards feeding themselves as teaching assistants moved in too quickly to feed them. Similarly, on rare occasions, not enough is done to promote pupils' numeracy skills in lessons and hydrotherapy sessions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. This is because staff very skilfully position pupils comfortably using specially adapted chairs so that they are free from pain and able to reach the equipment they need to learn. Staff massage the hands of pupils who struggle to grip objects before expecting them to do so. They are particularly adept at enabling pupils to communicate in a 'total communication environment' (that means giving them access to pictures, symbols and switches).
- With obstacles removed all pupils enjoy the interesting and relevant activities set for them whatever their particular needs. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are sat away from areas and/or objects in the classroom which tend to distract them, such as windows or particular resources important for teaching the rest of the class.
- Behaviour is outstanding. When pupils get off the bus in the morning they move as quickly as they are able to greet their teachers who come out to welcome them. Some sign 'good morning' and others say 'hello', all have gorgeous smiles on their faces as they do so. There are spontaneous moments of humour as a pupil stretches out his hand to gesture 'Give it five' and then with a grin withdraws his hand.
- There are no racist or bullying incidents and no exclusions. Rare incidents of challenging behaviour are related to pupils' particular difficulties. For example, when some pupils first start at the school (in different year groups) they can become distressed out of frustration at not being able to communicate. The speech therapy team helps these pupils to overcome this difficulty. As pupils do so, both their behaviour and achievement improve significantly.
- Pupils who speak using words say that they feel safe at school. They say 'We can talk about what makes us unhappy or sad with a teacher'. Using emergent signs and gesture, pupils with the most complex needs express who they want to manage their intimate care requirements. Overwhelmingly, parents say, 'Our children are safe'.
- Pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe is exceptional. They understand that when working on a local farm they must always wash their hands after touching the pigs and before eating their dinner. Using signing they communicate the importance of wearing a helmet when riding a 'bike'. They know that when using a computer at home they should be supervised by a responsible adult.

- Attendance for most pupils is high. It has risen year-on-year over the past three years because more medical needs are being met at school and also because the school's family worker has been effective in working with parents to improve attendance. Absence is linked mostly to lengthy stays in hospital or frequent off-site visits to specialist medical clinics.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is relentless and highly effective in her drive to improve teaching. The very small amount of inadequate teaching that existed at the beginning of the current school year has been totally eradicated and the amount of outstanding teaching has increased.
- The quality of teaching is checked frequently and rigorously. Findings from lesson observations are used to target specific training for individual teachers. Teachers receive coaching from specialists. They respond enthusiastically and their teaching gets better. For example, in using resources and effective methods to enhance pupils' communication skills.
- The school has an accurate understanding of its good practice, but also of what could be even better. This is because senior leaders analyse every aspect of the school's work thoroughly and use this analysis to plan improvements. The decisive actions that follow greatly benefit pupils. For example, a year ago the analysis of reading results posed some questions about whether pupils could achieve better in reading. A new approach to reading was launched, teachers were trained, and pupils now make outstanding progress in reading.
- Senior, middle and subject leaders drive improvements well. However, the drive on promoting pupils' numeracy skills across subjects and various therapy sessions lags a little behind that of the development of their communication skills.
- Effective partnership working between health professionals and senior leaders ensure that pupils receive good quality speech therapy and physiotherapy support, which greatly helps with their communication and mobility.
- Work with parents is outstanding. Parents are taught how to support their children through signing and help them gain confidence as they learn together at home. The school's family worker makes a very valuable contribution in supporting parents in helping their children to learn.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because of the wide range of first hand experiences they are provided with. For example, by staying for a short time in makeshift shelters (during the school day) constructed in the school's grounds, they experience what it is like to be homeless. Consequently, members of the school council, supported by a teacher, organized a non-uniform day to raise money for homeless people. Pupils' awareness of cultural diversity is heightened through activities such as participating in Afro-Caribbean drumming and Bhangra dancing at the end of Eid.
- Leaders ensure that all groups of pupils have an equal chance to succeed in every aspect of their learning and development. The school does not tolerate any form of discrimination.
- The local authority provides good support, particularly in training governors. It provides good

advice to the school enabling the senior leaders to develop high quality and accurate assessment systems.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body supports and challenges the headteacher effectively. Governors are skilled and well-equipped to fulfil their responsibilities. They know about the achievement of pupils across each disability group within the school because the headteacher shares regular progress reports with them. Governors also visit classes to see what is going on for themselves. They do not shy away from asking senior leaders probing questions about pupils' progress. Governors know what is working well and where improvements are required within the school. They support senior leaders in school improvement planning and monitor the action plans put in place. Regular training from the local authority supports governors in being effective with this work. The governing body know where the pupil premium funding is targeted and are updated frequently on the impact of this funding. Governors ensure that a robust policy links teachers' performance to pay, based on how well they promote pupils' learning. They know about any teaching concerns and take decisive action, in partnership with the headteacher, to address them. The headteacher's performance is reviewed in accordance with regulations. Governors make sure that safeguarding meets requirements.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	103883
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	400668

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ivan Dalloway
Headteacher	Marie Bissell
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2010
Telephone number	01384 818945
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