

# Pitcheroak School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117056
<b>Local Authority</b>	Worcestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	358071
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 October 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alan Dobbins

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	128
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	28
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Louise Hodgkinson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Freer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 February 2008
<b>School address</b>	Willow Way Batchley, Redditch B97 6PQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01527 65576
<b>Fax number</b>	01527 67845
<b>Email address</b>	office@pitcheroak.worcs.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 15 lessons and 11 of the school's teachers. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and a governor responsible for safeguarding, staff and groups of pupils, and they spoke with the School Improvement Partner. They looked at policies and documents and the data the school have on pupils' progress. They scrutinised 29 questionnaires from parents and carers and met with 10 parents.

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

- How clear an understanding does the school have of pupils' progress?
- How effectively do staff and specialists from outside agencies provide equal access to the school's provision for all pupils?
- What impact is the new leadership team having on driving forward improvement?

## Information about the school

Pitcheroak School is an average-sized school designated for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Increasingly, pupils are entering the school with more complex difficulties that include behavioural and social difficulties and autism. Pupils attend from the region around Redditch and all have statements of special educational needs. There are more than twice as many boys as girls. From September 2010, due to retirements, there has been a significant change in the senior leadership team with the appointment of two new deputy headteachers and a new sixth form leader. The school holds a number of awards, including Investors in People and a Leading Aspect award for outreach work in language and communication.

**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

Pitcheroak is a good school. It is a safe, happy and harmonious place in which pupils thrive as learners and as developing young people and are being prepared well for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Parents and carers are quick to praise the school, one saying that the school is 'fantastic' and another, 'My son loves his school and is so proud to be part of it. As a parent I could ask for no more.'

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a good start to their schooling. They settle quickly and make good progress against their starting points in each of the early learning areas. By the time they enter Year 1 they have learnt the rules and expectations for learning and, by their actions, show they enjoy working hard to do their best. Between Year 1 and Year 11, pupils make good progress. This is clearly shown when their scores for reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics and science are compared with those of equivalent children in similar schools nationally. Sixth form pupils follow individual programmes for learning based on their capabilities and interests. The grades they gain over a wide range of nationally accredited awards confirm their good preparation for their next challenge.

Pupils say they like school. They attend regularly and as they move through the school they gain an excellent understanding of the importance of being safe at all times and what to do if they feel troubled or bothered. The school is welcoming and well ordered because pupils and all staff relate very well to each other. Pupils trust staff and see them as their friends who will always help them if they are distressed. They behave well and their good attitudes to their work show that they have fully accepted their role as learners. Over time, they gain a secure understanding of right and wrong and many show maturity when they have difficult choices to make, including those to do with staying safe and keeping healthy.

Since the last inspection, through their procedures for self-evaluation, the senior management team have accurately judged the overall effectiveness of the school and know the strengths and weaknesses well. The headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body are enthusiastic and committed to driving the school even further forward. Leaders and managers recognise that the current system for assessing, recording and tracking progress is not rigorous enough to help teachers plan lessons that include tasks that are accurately matched to pupils' learning needs. Since the last inspection teaching has improved, parents and carers are more effective in supporting the work of the school and more links have been established with other schools. These, and the good knowledge that leaders have of the quality of the school and of the developments required to make the school even better, show the capacity for sustaining improvement is good.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders, and governors, should continue to raise attainment and improve progress by:
  - operating more effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, but especially the quality of teaching and learning
  - sharpening the procedures for setting targets for pupils' learning and for evaluating progress toward these targets
  - planning lessons with precise objectives for learning and linked success criteria that effectively challenge all pupils.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

In a caring and secure environment, pupils gain a very clear understanding of safe and unsafe situations and flourish, both as learners and as young people, as they develop and gain independence skills. This is the case for all pupils, including the minority of girls and those with the most complex needs who have the greatest difficulty in relating their thoughts and feelings. Pupils' strong relationships with their teachers and teaching assistants help them become increasingly comfortable and confident as learners and, because of this, most lessons are enjoyable events. In these lessons pupils have fun as they learn, and this helps them to develop their communication and social skills and to establish genuine friendships with each other. For example, in an art lesson, the high level of challenge and the outstanding relationships between the teacher, the assistants and the pupils resulted in a spirited effort by pupils to follow the style of Kandinsky in their work.

Pupils make good progress between Year 1 and Year 11. This is clearly shown in the results they gain on the accredited awards they take in Year 11. Last year's leavers did well when compared with pupils in other similar schools nationally by gaining, collectively, entry level passes in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, unit awards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and a range of other awards reflecting the good development of their independence skills.

Pupils have a very clear awareness of the importance of staying healthy. They identify the healthy foods they have at lunch times and, to be physically active, a good percentage attend the lunch-time and after-school sports clubs. They are proud to be members of the school council and of the charitable causes they have supported, including Red Nose Day and Children in Need. They gain good awareness of the needs of the local community through their many visits to local places, such as the local shops and parks in support of their learning and, for the older pupils, through the work experience placements. The residential visits let pupils gain first-hand experiences of the wider world but, although they enjoy special focus days such as the Asian and French days, overall the provision for raising awareness of different cultures is limited and is a current focus for development. The good gains made in self-confidence and self-esteem support pupils' good understanding of spiritual issues, such as the importance of trust and friendship.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## How effective is the provision?

School records show that more good and outstanding lessons, and fewer satisfactory lessons, are being taught than at the time of the last inspection. This reflects an improvement in overall teaching, especially as teachers and the teaching assistants are working with an increasing number of pupils who require them to have a greater range of skills, knowledge and expertise. More often than not teachers and assistants fully meet this challenge, even in the smallest sized classrooms that limit the range of strategies that can be used to promote learning. Outstanding teaching and learning were seen in a small number of lessons. Nevertheless, while teaching is good overall, it can be better. In some lessons, planning does not give enough attention to what pupils know and can do, and learning objectives and the linked success criteria are not always precise enough, or relevant to the learning needs and capabilities of individual pupils.

The curriculum is a good match between pupils' learning needs and their capabilities. In the lower school, the focus is on basic skills and enhancing communication abilities. As pupils move through the school, academic learning is linked well with specific opportunities to learn and demonstrate the skills of independence. In Years 10 and 11, pupils benefit from their many vocational training experiences and their regular visits to

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local colleges. When they enter the sixth form they are prepared well to expect success as learners and, as young people, to operate as independently as possible.

The way in which the school cares for its pupils and guides and supports them, their parents, carers and their families is a real strength. Sustaining the learning, development and well-being of pupils is an ethos visible throughout all the work of the school and this is helped by the strong relationships staff have with pupils and their families. The very well-targeted expert work of staff, sometimes led by the advice of specialists, especially the speech therapists, helps all pupils gain full access to all that the school offers and makes a key contribution to them thriving as learners and as young people. Parents and carers are thrilled with this, one saying that the progress her son has made since joining the school is the direct result of the 'very high quality of the care, guidance and support that she and her son have received from the school.' Almost all parents and carers attend the annual review of their children's progress and an increasing number are involved in supporting their children's learning at home. Provision for pupils as outlined in their statements of educational needs is met in full. Good arrangements ensure that transition for pupils through school is smooth.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have done well in maintaining good progress and in improving important aspects of the school, including teaching. They have the energy, enthusiasm, skills and experience to make the school even more effective in its work. Governors take a full part in planning for development and operate effective procedures that ensure pupils are safe at school. The procedures for self-evaluation have worked effectively enough in maintaining the good quality of the provision. However, they are not yet sophisticated enough to provide the accurate analysis required to move the school further forward. To achieve this more precise information is required, especially for recognising the progress pupils are making, how this compares with pupils in other equivalent schools and the quality of teaching. There is no discrimination and staff strive to ensure that all pupils have equal access to all that the school offers.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough and the school ensures that it adopts good practice. Parents, carers and pupils see the school as a very safe and secure place. Due regard has been paid to community cohesion. Pupils have a very good knowledge of their local community through many well-established links and through their regular visits to local places. Experiences of communities outside the local area are primarily gained through residential visits to Wales. While international links are being established, pupils

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have a long history of supporting international charities, most recently the Haitian Earthquake Appeal. The impact of partnerships is having a very positive effect on pupils' progress. Partnerships with other schools and agencies provide outstanding support for the work of the school. Through the Leading Aspect award, many mainstream schools in the region make use of Pitcheroak staff in working with pupils who have language and communication difficulties. The links established with mainstream schools have been used well. A good number of Pitcheroak pupils regularly visit other schools and gain from taking lessons taught by specialist teachers in subjects that range from mathematics to physical education.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children gain a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Early Years is a friendly place in which children settle quickly and well. In a safe and comfortable environment, they develop outstandingly strong relationships with their adults. As they gain confidence as learners and as young people, their emerging personalities begin to show. Additional support required to meet the particular difficulties that some children have with learning is very effective. Consequently, in each of the early learning areas, all children make good progress against their starting points. Good evidence of this is provided in their learning journals, which detail many of their experiences over their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Resources to support learning are good, but the outdoor area is not always used well enough in extending the range of children's experiences. Relationships with families are very strong and their very close links with staff benefit the progress of many of the children. Leadership is good, as is the day-to-day management. Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the Early Years Foundation Stage well and make good plans for improvement.

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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	2
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

The sixth form prepares students well so that they can confidently anticipate being successful at the next stage of their education, which, for almost all, is at a local college of further education. Teaching is most often good and sometimes outstanding. Consequently, students make good progress towards gaining good grades on a wide range of accredited courses that suit their capabilities and interests. The flexible curriculum provides many opportunities to learn outside school, including at local colleges of further education and in a wide range of work places. These are of particular benefit because they add considerable breadth to students' learning experiences and provide valuable opportunities for them to gain the self-confidence and self-assurance that come from meeting new challenges successfully. The outstanding support and guidance students receive over their time in the sixth form makes their transition to further education straightforward.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	2
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

The parents and carers who returned the questionnaire or who talked to an inspector are very pleased with the work of the school. They fully support most aspects of the school. They are pleased that their children enjoy the school and that they feel safe there. They like the way in which the school is led and managed, the good teaching, the good behaviour and the way pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education and their future lives. A small minority feel that the school could do more to help them support their children's learning at home, although inspectors saw a number of opportunities for parents and carers to find out from the school how they can help their children at home. Most parents and carers would fully support the statement of one who wrote that, 'Pitcheroak is a very warm and welcoming school.' Inspectors agree with this.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pitcheroak 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 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 128 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	86	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	25	86	4	14	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	18	62	10	34	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	59	10	34	2	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	59	12	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	66	6	21	3	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	66	9	31	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)	18	64	7	25	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	69	8	28	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	64	10	36	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	54	11	39	2	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	66	10	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	72	7	24	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 all 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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



6 October 2010

Dear Children, Pupils and Students

**Inspection of Pitcheroak School, Redditch, B97 6PQ**

It was lovely for me and my colleague to meet and spend time with you when we visited your school. Thank you for making us welcome. We found your school to be a good school. These are some of the things we especially liked:

- the outstanding way the adults and others who visit the school help you in your learning and in growing up
- the good progress you make in your learning and in developing as independent young people
- the good way you behave and work hard in your lessons
- that you feel safe and are happy at school
- that you are learning subjects that will help you so that when you leave the school you are prepared well for your next challenge
- the enthusiasm of your leaders and governors to make the school an even better place
- the way in which they provide extra opportunities for you through linking with other schools.

There are a few things we would like the school to do better. We would like your leaders to improve the assessment system to make it easier for the governors to know how well you are doing and to help teachers plan lessons that are always right for you. This improved system should help in judging how well you are doing against your targets for learning, and give senior leaders information on how well you are doing when compared with other pupils in similar schools. We believe that these changes will help you to reach even higher standards and make the school an even better place in which to learn. Of course, you can help, too, by keeping on attending as often as you do and by always working as hard in your lessons as you did when my colleague and I visited your classrooms.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins

Lead inspector

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