

Pathways Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	128190
Local Authority	Redcar and Cleveland
Inspection number	343794
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs V Halton
Headteacher	Mr S O'Gara
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed 11 lessons, observing 10 teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher, a group of pupils, a governor, a parent and with the school's middle and senior managers. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including the school's records of pupils' progress; minutes of meetings of the governing body; and records and policies related to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. They scrutinised questionnaires from staff and pupils and the four questionnaires that were received from parents and carers.

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

- It considered the school's improvement overall since the previous inspection.
- It looked at whether recent improvements in attendance noted at the monitoring visit in March 2010 had been sustained.
- It considered whether pupils' behaviour and attitudes to school had continued to improve.
- It investigated how successfully the curriculum and the teaching were promoting pupils' enjoyment and achievement.
- It looked at the impact of the new headteacher and how well all the staff are implementing his vision for the school.

Information about the school

Pathways Special School is smaller than most similar schools. The school is organised into two sections: a primary section with nine pupils and a secondary section with 33 students. All students have a statement of special educational needs related to emotional, behavioural or social difficulties. Around half of the students also have additional learning needs, mostly moderate learning difficulties. Over half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals.

At the time of its previous inspection in July 2009 the school was judged to be underperforming and was given a notice to improve. Since then there has been a large number of staffing changes including at senior leadership level. The current headteacher took up post in March 2010.

The school is entering a soft federation arrangement with the local authority to include the provision for the education of children otherwise than at school (EOTAS), whereby the current headteacher of Pathways Special School will take up the post of executive headteacher. At the time of this inspection, the arrangements for this had not been confirmed.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Since the appointment of the new headteacher in March 2010 Pathways Special School has improved considerably so that its overall effectiveness is now satisfactory. A number of aspects of the school's work, such as the care, guidance and support provided for students, are good. This is reflected in much higher levels of attendance and improved behaviour. This indicates that students are enjoying school more and are better placed to benefit from what is on offer. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, judged satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, is now good. Students' attitudes to school are more positive.

Other aspects of the school's work are also better, for example the partnerships with parents and carers, the local authority, outside agencies and professionals. Links to support and promote students' achievement and well-being have been strengthened and are good. The school's governance is strong, helping to drive forward improvement at a fast pace.

Attendance is improving rapidly. For example, in the summer term 2010 attendance was 20% higher than in the same period in 2009. Nevertheless, attendance figures are still well below national average. Accordingly, improving attendance further remains a priority.

Students' behaviour is satisfactory. In lessons where teaching was good there was a direct link to good behaviour: students became engaged quickly in the lesson and their learning was good. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but there are times when the expectations of what students can do are too low, or the pace of the lesson is not well managed. As a result, learning slows down and disruptive behaviour may result.

Students' achievement and enjoyment are satisfactory. Students' rate of progress in the secondary section is, on the whole, faster than that of pupils in the primary section.

With the addition of a modern foreign language in Key Stage 3, the curriculum now meets statutory requirements. The curriculum is satisfactory and has a number of good features, for example there are strengths in creative subjects, notably art and photography, and in information and communication technology. Recently, the school has embarked on several initiatives aimed at developing the curriculum further to better meet the needs of all students.

The school has good capacity to improve further. The headteacher's determined leadership has moved the school a long way in a few months. Staff share his energetic vision. Good systems are in place to carry the school forward.

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The school's self-evaluation grades are in some cases too generous. The school has certainly come a long way in a short space of time, but has to build further on this to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can. Behaviour management is generally effective: appropriate policies and procedures are in place though, as yet, these are not always implemented consistently.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers, especially in the primary section, have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils know and can do, so that lessons challenge and engage pupils and move their learning on at a faster pace.
- Pursue the strategies for attendance to build on the recent, significant improvements in attendance rates.
- Monitor how effectively and consistently the agreed behaviour management policies and strategies are being implemented, with a view to reducing still further the incidence of seriously disruptive behaviour.
- Promote further students' achievement and enjoyment of school through developing the recent curriculum initiatives aimed at offering an increasingly relevant and meaningful range of opportunities and qualifications.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' attainment is low on entry to the school, usually because their negative behaviour patterns and other social factors have held back their progress at previous schools. Despite the gaps in what they know, students catch up sufficiently so that they leave school at the end of Year 11 with accreditation for their learning. Individual students who are more able gain good grades at GCSE. The very large majority of students remain in education or training.

In 2009 all students left school with accreditation at GCSE level for mathematics and English. In 2010 those students who were at school full-time also gained accreditation in either English or mathematics. Those students who had been educated otherwise, off-site, achieved less well. However, the school now has better systems in place for monitoring the progress of such students and is reintegrating a small number into school.

Learning and progress as observed in the classroom are satisfactory. In lessons observed, when the teaching was good and tasks were imaginative and challenging, students' progress was good. This headed off any disruptive behaviour, because students were enjoying learning. The school's data show that students currently progress more rapidly in the secondary section than pupils in the primary section. However, the number of students in each year is very small and so secure statistical comparisons are difficult to make.

An audit of behaviour patterns shows that behaviour is improving. Exclusions have fallen dramatically and incidents of poor or aggressive behaviour are much less frequent.

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Nevertheless, students in their questionnaires and in discussion said that behaviour is still not good.

Inspectors judge that, overall, behaviour is well managed. Behaviour on the second day of the inspection was much better than on the first, when inspectors witnessed swearing and aggressive behaviour. Inspectors recognise that this inspection took place just over one week into the new school year and that this proved unsettling for students. A number of additional factors came into play: several new staff, new students and visitors to school. However, on occasions, staff are inconsistent in how they apply the agreed policies and procedures for managing behaviour and students exploit this.

The personal, social and health education programme helps to raise students' awareness of keeping safe. This has included a focus on using mobile phones and the internet safely. The school stresses the importance of healthy lifestyles and the dangers of risky behaviour. Students understand the messages but a good number do not put them into practice. Generous provision of time for physical education encourages exercise.

Students' social and moral development is at the heart of what the school is trying to do. A structured programme of visits out of school helps to foster this and enhances students' cultural development. Students comment that they like these outings. The school council is proving to be a useful vehicle for students to get involved in decisions that affect them in school: they are rightly proud of their new common room. They were keen to tell the inspector that they had been part of the appointment process for the current headteacher.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Inspectors saw several good lessons. It is clear that teachers have benefited from a good, structured programme of professional development. The school is increasing its use of subject specialist teachers as a means of helping to promote achievement further. However, in some of the less successful lessons observed, assessment information was not always used as effectively as it might have been: slow pace and mundane tasks were factors in some students becoming restless, and hindered progress. The recent arrival of new students or staff had interrupted continuity, creating some tension in school. Nevertheless, this illustrates the importance for the future of pitching lessons precisely to meet each student's needs.

The school is continuing to develop its curriculum, to make it relevant and exciting. For example, there are now opportunities to participate in outdoor education. The curriculum for English and mathematics is being reviewed to align more with the functional skills students require to help them gain employment. An after-school club has begun that includes activities such as swimming. Increasingly, the curriculum is becoming personalised. These changes are helping to encourage positive attitudes to school.

There are good systems for tracking students' progress. Data helpfully show how students are doing compared with national norms. Systems have been recently enhanced by the introduction of an electronic learner record for all students that brings together all the information related to their education and well-being. This good record keeping underpins the good, care guidance and support provided for students. Good partnerships with parents and carers, outside agencies and professionals ensure that students' developmental and emotional needs are met well. The appointments of a teacher to lead on emotional well-being; and a counsellor for students, together with a mentoring system for each student, reflect the emphasis the school gives to meeting students' needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Several aspects of the school's work have improved considerably since the previous inspection, such as the partnerships with parents and carers, the local authority, outside agencies and professionals. Links to support and promote students' achievement and well-being have been strengthened. The cohesion of the school community has improved, with staff and students all playing their part. The school's governance is strong. Backed up by considerable, well-targeted support from the local authority, this is helping to drive forward improvement at a fast pace.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Leaders and managers embed ambition and drive improvement well. The headteacher's leadership is excellent; he has re-energised the whole school behind a clear plan of action that has had impact. The school promotes equality well. The staff are committed to encouraging and supporting students to achieve as well as they can and to remove barriers to learning.

A number of additional, recent appointments to positions of responsibility, such as for community and for well-being, and to subject specialisms, have strengthened leadership teams. Governors and leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. Safeguarding is given a high priority. The school conducts all the required checks on staff. Policies and procedure are in place, though in some cases need updating.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents' and carers' views are very positive and no concerns were expressed. Students' questionnaires were also positive but two students said that they did not feel safe in school.

The school's leaders know that they have to keep on top of instances of bullying. Sometimes, bullying spills over into school from outside. The school's records and students' comments indicate that this is being tackled with increasing effectiveness. Inspectors observed that staff supervise students carefully to minimise conflicts.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pathways Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 4 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 42 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	0	0	4	100	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	25	3	75	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	50	1	25	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)	1	25	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	25	3	75	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	2	50	2	50	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). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' 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.



17 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Pathways Special School, Middlesbrough, TS6 7NP

I am writing to thank you for your help when I came recently to inspect your school, with Mrs Wilson, to tell you what we found and what we think the school should be doing next.

We think that your school has improved a lot since its last inspection, so much so that it no longer needs to be in what we call 'a category of concern'. Pathways Special School now provides a satisfactory education. We agree with you that your new headteacher, Mr O'Gara, has made a big difference since he came.

- The care, guidance and support that the staff give you are good. We were impressed by how much effort goes in from your school's staff, your parents and carers, and others to support you.

I was pleased to see your new common room and to hear how you are able to get involved in what is happening in your school.

- Your achievement is satisfactory. You are making satisfactory progress. It is great to hear that at the end of Year 11 so many students go on to college, training or employment. That really shows what you can do when you try!
- Your attendance is improving really quickly. The school has worked hard on encouraging you to come to school regularly so that you can improve your basic skills. Well done to all of you who have got up in the mornings and come in, even when you did not really feel like it! The school's attendance figures are still below other schools, however, so we have said to Mr O' Gara that this must improve further.
- Behaviour is better: it is by no means perfect yet, but it is much better than it was. This is very important because it means you can get on with learning. It really matters that everyone tries their best to control their behaviour. If you can do well at school we know it will help you for your future.
- Teaching is satisfactory. We saw some really good lessons, but sometimes lessons could be more interesting. Sometimes what you are asked to do seems to be too easy. On the other hand, if someone starts to cause trouble this also slows down what others can learn.

Mostly your questionnaires showed you are pleased with your school, but one or two of you said that you did not feel safe at school. We were concerned to hear this, so we talked to Mr O' Gara, without giving any names. We have been assured that he will do his best to help. You told us that the school is dealing with this sort of thing much better now. We can see that the staff supervise the school carefully to help keep you safe. If you are worried, do talk to a member of staff you feel you can trust.

We have every confidence that Mr O'Gara and his team can continue to improve your school. They have good ideas, but they need your support to do it!

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon

Her Majesty's Inspector

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