

Marshlands School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124518
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380910
Inspection dates	24-25 May 2012
Lead inspector	Alan Lemon

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	2-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Francis
Headteacher	Kim Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2009
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Age group	2-11
Inspection date(s)	24-24 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Alan Lemon

Additional Inspector

Janet Bird

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed nine lessons involving six teachers. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, representatives of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at important school documentation including its self-evaluation, data on pupils' progress, the improvement plan and policies for safeguarding pupils. Questionnaires completed by parents and carers were scrutinised along with those from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. There are no pupils on roll under the age of three years old. The large majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties. A significant number of these pupils also have an autism spectrum condition and/or challenging behaviour. Approximately a quarter of all pupils has profound and multiple learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average.

There is an after-school club on Tuesdays managed by an outside organisation.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because there is not a sufficiently rigorous focus on analysing progress data to ensure pupils' targets are as challenging as possible, or to agree what outstanding progress looks like.
- Pupils' learning and progress are good leading to good achievement in communication, literacy, numeracy and in their personal development. Pupils value their experiences of school. Many enjoy learning and all make good efforts to meet expectations with regard to completing tasks.
- Teaching is continuously monitored and improved and is effective in ensuring pupils achieve well. Teachers and their assistants form strong teams supporting pupils' learning. Lessons are lively, fast paced and planned carefully in relation to pupils' needs and capabilities.
- Pupils are positively encouraged to manage their behaviour and receive strong, consistent support in doing so. As a result, behaviour does not interrupt the course of learning and progress and the school is a calm, friendly and safe environment for all pupils. Pupils' quickly develop good attitudes to learning from enjoying their work, thriving on their good relationships with staff and growing self-confidence.
- School leaders are ambitious in pursuing improvement. The governing body sets high expectations and provides strong support. The governing body, school leaders and staff work as a cohesive team in leading teaching and driving improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement so that it is outstanding and increase pupils' progress by:
 - setting more challenging targets for each pupil through the rigorous recording and analysis of progress data

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- all staff sharing a clear understanding of what amount of improvement represents outstanding progress for each pupil.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Progress over time is good as pupils apply themselves effectively to improving their knowledge, skills and understanding. Almost all parents and carers believe their children make good progress. Pupils starting points vary considerably but from these all build skills systematically and quickly in literacy, numeracy and personal development. They have good attitudes to learning developed from an enjoyment of school, stimulating positive interest in work and activities. Pupils across the school apply themselves well to work and sustain effort. Children in the Reception Year make good progress as they learn effectively using the wide range of well-resourced activities provided. The very effective ways in which adults manage behaviour, maintain high expectations and clear routines enables pupils to stay attentive and concentrate on completing their work. Those with autism spectrum conditions manage the changes in activities calmly. Pupils begin the day purposefully arriving in the classroom ready to settle to some reading, writing or counting, which focuses their attention. Visual timetables and conversations with staff assure them about the day ahead and they settle to work.

The great many opportunities throughout each day for pupils to communicate make them confident to contribute in lessons either through speaking or signing. All pupils learn sign language and those that can speak sign to those who communicate only by using sign language. Whatever their ability, pupils make rapid progress in improving their reading and writing. The youngest pupils and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties hear stories, handle books and use pictures and this creates much interest and enjoyment. Those beginning to read learn and link letters with their sounds to confidently and accurately tackle new and difficult words. Where this skill is beyond pupils' capabilities, they use pictures, symbols and familiar words to read and are able to access information and enjoy reading. More-able pupils progress well and read independently, reading a wide range of books in school and at home. A few make good progress and attain a level of reading and writing near to that expected for their age. From the Reception Year onwards pupils learn to hold writing tools, starting with free mark-making to controlling marks and forming letters. Older pupils with severe learning difficulties write their own names and copy sentences they have spoken which are first written by an adult. More able pupils in Years 5 and 6 wrote in their own words their accounts of Greek myths. These were very neatly written in well-formed sentences, carefully punctuated and capturing the drama of the stories they had read.

Pupils all benefit from many opportunities to learn about number and counting, understanding a range of concepts such as large and small, short and long. More-

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able pupils in Years 5 and 6 add and subtract two-digit numbers and name and describe the properties of three-dimensional shapes such as cones and cylinders.

Quality of teaching

Teachers, and all of the adults in classrooms who help them support pupils' learning and progress, are expert in meeting pupils' wide range of needs. In the class of Years 5 and 6 pupils, masterful management of autistic pupils' behaviour enabled them to settle and work on number problems. Adults know pupils well and their assessment of pupils' performance in lessons keeps them fully abreast of their abilities and progress. However, regular recording and evidencing of pupils' progress and improvement in attainment is not established in a systematic way. This takes some sharpness out of the school's intended focus that targets should be as ambitious and challenging as possible.

Teachers and others use their knowledge and expertise often to good effect to match work to pupils' needs and attainments. Teachers and those assisting them are very effective in managing pupils' behaviour and as classroom teams they achieve considerable consistency in their methods. This helps the significant number of pupils who have challenging behaviour to settle, stay calm and complete tasks. Adults maintain a high level of engagement with pupils, involving them in conversations, giving them instructions and ensuring pupils are clear on what is expected. When asked, pupils said they enjoyed lessons and liked their teachers. As a result, to pupils school is a special place and they clearly value the experiences it offers them. This is reflected in their parents' and carers' views. The good rapport between adults and pupils makes teaching and learning lively and interesting. Pupils are happy and keen to join in and contribute. In the Reception Year, children became very involved in the good variety of challenging activities developing their communication and writing skills. These activities also helped children improve self-awareness, confidence, social skills and independence.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The large majority of pupils say they feel safe and, being well supported and closely supervised, they are kept safe. Almost all parents and carers feel their children are safe and the large majority think behaviour is good. Parents and carers know lessons are sometimes disrupted by poor behaviour and are right in appreciating that this arises out of pupils' complex learning difficulties. One parent commented, 'My son has quite complex behavioural problems and his teachers are amazing; they keep him focused and calm.' Well-established behaviour management strategies are very effective in significantly reducing outbursts and disruption. All staff are well trained, expert and consistent in dealing with difficult behaviour. Their management of pupils is assured and sensitive and seldom requires their physical intervention and deals effectively with any risk of bullying. Most of the time the school is quiet and orderly with pupils being friendly, helpful and co-operative. Over time pupils learn to understand the need to behave well and increasingly they manage their own behaviour. Many know and appreciate school rules and adults' expectations to the

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extent of reminding and encouraging others to behave appropriately. Pupils' adherence to the expectation of good behaviour ensures there is no bullying as pupils develop a strong regard for each other.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's good leadership gives staff clear direction and ambition for meeting pupils' needs and raising their achievement. Occasionally, however, the targets set are not challenging enough, and there is not a common understanding of what outstanding progress looks like for each pupil. The governing body is resolute in ensuring weaknesses are tackled and governors add impetus to the drive for improvement. Together with the governing body, staff ensure pupils are protected and kept safe. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Regular monitoring by senior leaders has secured rapid progress in improving the quality of teaching. The course of the staff's professional development has been effectively steered by an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and robust performance management. Training has improved the teaching of reading and the sounds letters make to pupils with complex needs. Methods and resources have been developed for pupils unable to develop the skills of linking letters and sounds so that all pupils improve their literacy. Consequently, the school is well placed to improve further.

Comprehensive evaluation of the school's work has prompted the reorganisation of some classes. This enables a sharp focus on meeting needs such as those pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable requiring a nurture approach and particularly strong support in managing their behaviour. The close attention to individual needs underlines the high priority to equality seen clearly in the school's work. Middle leaders are developing the curriculum well and are providing a wide variety of enjoyable learning opportunities and planning more. Working outdoors, learning through practical, investigative activities and cultural experiences such as Indian dance, better meet pupils' needs and promote effectively their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



25 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marshlands School, Stafford, ST17 4RD

Thank you for the very warm welcome when we visited your school and many thanks to the pupils who I met to talk about school. Your school is a good school.

These are some of its strongest features

- You are making good progress in reading, writing, and mathematics and learning sign language.
- Teachers and all of the other adults in classrooms are good at helping you to learn. They make lessons enjoyable and provide you with work that means you can progress well. You have made it very clear that you thoroughly enjoy school and like your teachers, which you say helps you work hard and make progress.
- Your behaviour is good, which is a good achievement for some who find that difficult. Staff help enormously and make sure behaviour stays good. You are keen to do your best to behave well and encourage others to do so.
- The headteacher is making sure the school continues to improve at a good pace. All of the staff are working hard and they are making sure you all have the best opportunities to learn and make progress.

I have asked the headteacher to see that teachers make very sure when they set targets for you that these are as challenging as possible so that you make all of the progress you can.

You can help the headteacher improve the school by carrying on behaving as well as you are doing and by continuing to work hard in lessons. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon
Lead Inspector

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