

Merefield School

Westminster Drive, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2QZ

Inspection dates 13–14 November 2012

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders form a well-respected team that is driving improvement at pace and is expertly led by the headteacher. The Chair of the Governing Body shares the team's ambition and drive. Almost universally, staff are fully on-board and pulling in the same direction.
- The vast majority of parents who returned the school's recent questionnaire are very happy with their children's education and progress.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good with the amount of outstanding teaching on the increase. Teaching has improved because of good quality training and the way staff work closely together to share their good practice.
- The sixth form is good and equips students well for the next stage in their lives.
- The pupils thrive because they feel happy, safe and secure. Staff know them very well and make sure no one misses out. Systems to safeguard the pupils are very strong.
- Despite a few pupils' frustrations because of their communication difficulties, their behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school. Staff expertly deal with the rare episodes of difficult behaviour and disruptions to learning are minimal as a result.
- Pupils' achievement has improved and increasingly larger numbers are making better than expected progress. Their personal and social development is splendid. This is shown by many pupils improving their behaviour markedly when they join the school and by the increasing numbers gaining awards for being as independent as possible.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough of the teaching is outstanding and, because of this, pupils' academic achievements are not universally top notch.
- Although improved, the targets set for pupils in lessons are sometimes not precise enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by 11 teachers, including a specialist teacher of physical education commissioned from another special school and one higher level teaching assistant. Two of the lessons were joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and members of staff.
- Inspectors took account of the four responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), the 15 staff questionnaire returns and the school's own recent survey of the views of 27 parents.
- The work of the school was observed and a number of documents were looked at including the school's self-evaluation, monitoring records, planning documents, records of governors' meetings and information about the achievements and behaviour of the pupils.

Inspection team

Eric Craven, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pauline Pitman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties. A little under half have autistic spectrum disorder.
- All the pupils have statements of special educational needs. There are twice as many boys as girls. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- Currently, there is only one pupil in the Early Years Foundation Stage who is taught with pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. Post-16 (sixth form) students are part of the 14-19 years department. They have some lessons as a separate group and others with pupils from Key Stage 4.
- The school is situated in an affluent area of Sefton but the pupils are transported to school from all parts of the local authority.
- A new headteacher was appointed in January 2012 and there have been other staffing changes at senior level. Over the last couple of years the number of pupils on roll has increased by 15% due to the re-designation of another local authority special school.
- The government provides extra funding for the school for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or who are children of families in the services, through the pupil premium. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible to be supported by the pupil premium is broadly average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to further improve pupils' achievements, make the majority of teaching outstanding by:
 - making sure individual pupils have precise, measureable targets that are achievable in lessons so that they can appreciate the advances they make
 - ensuring that all adults consistently encourage pupils to do as much as they can for themselves
 - taking more opportunities to have pupils interact with their classmates in lessons
 - stressing pupils' learning even more when giving feedback on lesson observations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment, because of their special educational needs, is well below that of pupils nationally. However, the progress they make in their learning is good and in terms of their personal and social development it is even better than this.
- The rates of progress pupils make are increasing as the quality of teaching improves. Where progress is less evident this is not usually because of weak teaching but often due to pupils' medical conditions or other issues in their lives. Also, because they do not have precise targets to aim for in lessons, pupils are not always spurred on to achieve their very best. In comparison to similar pupils elsewhere, pupils are achieving well and the proportion doing better than other pupils is increasing.
- The school's very clear analysis of data on the progress pupils make shows that pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium fair as well as, and in some cases better than, other pupils at the school. Boys and girls generally do as well as each other although there are a few more girls than boys making the best rates of progress. Those with the most profound and multiple special educational needs make progress that is often better than pupils with similar difficulties elsewhere.
- The results of the school's survey of parents show that virtually all are happy with their children's progress. However, three of the four parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were at odds with this and felt their children were not making good progress. The school's records show that the great majority of pupils do make good progress in relation to their needs and starting points.
- Pupils' personal and social development is excellent. They develop skills that enable them to take as full a part as possible in school life. Often using alternative forms of communication such as picture cards, electronic equipment and gestures, they learn to communicate well. They get on well with staff and their confidence and self-esteem rise. They enjoy their education at this school.
- Students' independence is promoted well in the sixth form where the things they learn are more focused on life skills and transition to life beyond school. For example, they learn to shop and cook. All students in the sixth form have the opportunity to benefit from a residential experience where they cater for themselves. This adds greatly to the development of their life skills.
- More and more pupils are leaving school with appropriate awards, most often accredited by ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). All students who left the school in 2012 gained awards and it is testimony to improvements at the school that the levels of awards being gained are improving.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good and some is outstanding. The school's accurate records show that the amount of teaching that is good has risen over the past two years as has the proportion that is outstanding. However, there is not yet enough outstanding teaching to ensure all pupils achieve of their best.
- Teaching invariably includes regular and appropriate use of praise. This means a good deal to the pupils and helps raise their confidence. Relationships in lessons are excellent. It is often clear that staff are thoroughly enjoying themselves and this rubs off on the pupils. Pupils are guided through lessons well, with teachers making it clear what is to happen next.
- All lessons have some practical hands-on element, which captures pupils' interests. In a sixth form citizenship lesson, for example, students were working well together to restore a damaged and worn coffee table. They were developing practical skills and learning about recycling. When used, information and communication technology adds interest such as in a lesson where pupils went, one at a time, to the interactive whiteboard to move pictures of ducks to a pond as they

and their classmates sang a counting song.

- There is good and regular assessment that helps teachers to gauge the suitability of the work for the pupils. Additionally, teachers consistently evaluate their lessons so they can adjust subsequent plans. Nevertheless, in some lessons targets for pupils are too broad and not always set for an individual but for groups. This makes it difficult to measure a pupil's achievement at the end of the lesson and they do not get a chance to see exactly how much they have improved.
- Continuous record-keeping during lessons keeps teachers well informed. Armed with this information they check carefully to see if anyone is underachieving.
- Whatever their disabilities, pupils are given full access to lessons by imaginative use of resources and the efforts of staff to ensure they are fully involved, even, for example, if they need to be lying down.
- Teaching assistants are used well in lessons to support pupils' learning and they play their full part. However, there are occasions when pupils are given too much guidance or support and they are not empowered to do enough for themselves. Opportunities are sometimes lost in lessons for pupils to collaborate with a classmate to further their social skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons is excellent. Many have positive outlooks and are chirpy. Those who are more introverted and who sometimes find interactions difficult gradually learn to cope well with a world that they can find hectic and noisy. Staff expertly provide ways for these pupils to communicate and cope, and this puts many in control of their behaviour for the first time.
- It is not untypical for the number of behaviour incidents from a pupil new to the school to quickly and markedly reduce once they settle and build relationships with staff.
- Staff are becoming increasingly skilful at heading off difficulties by defusing potentially troublesome situations. The rare incident of problem behaviour is extremely well managed and quickly resolved so very little learning time is lost. Staff are very consistent in their approaches to managing behaviour and this consistency helps pupils learn what is acceptable and what is not.
- Staff show pupils courtesy and respect and pupils reciprocate. Those who met with the inspectors painted a very positive picture of a school where they feel safe and happy. This is a view endorsed by parents who say their children are happy and like the school.
- Staff give full attention to ensuring pupils are safe. The systems for the recruitment and vetting of staff are strong. Pupils understand how to keep safe with good examples being how they knew to wear masks when sanding down a coffee table and how they controlled themselves well and avoided one another when moving around the hall in an active physical education lesson.
- Attendance compares favourably with other special schools but is below the average for primary and secondary schools. Good checks are made on attendance. It is the absence of a few pupils with significant medical problems that draws down the overall rate of attendance.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- It is testimony to the high regard most parents have for the school that almost unanimously they say they would recommend the school to someone else. To the same extent, they say the school is well led and managed. All four who responded to the on-line questionnaire said they would recommend the school to another parent.
- The school's leaders communicate high expectations to staff who are keen to play their parts to the full. Significant staffing changes over the last 18 months or so have been managed very well and the school has been kept on an even keel.

- If anything leaders are a little too modest when judging their own performance, believing that pupils' achievements need to be outstanding before leadership and management can be judged in the same way. This is laudable but does not give enough weight to the fast pace of improvement at this school, notably in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
 - The school's evaluation of its work and how it needs to improve is accurate. Reviews and checks to make sure things are right are commonplace at all levels in the school. These include seeking the views of parents, and checks on the quality of teaching and learning.
 - The headteacher's drive to ensure learning is paramount in all the school does has been adopted by staff. The feedback given to teachers following lesson observations by senior staff has helped to improve the quality of teaching. However, some lesson feedback records show that too much emphasis is still being placed on what the teacher does rather than what the pupils learn.
 - The teachers who met with inspectors say morale is high and they are clear where the school is heading. Typically one said, 'We can see where we are going and why'. They have benefited greatly from increased collaboration with their colleagues as a result of a revised department and line management structure.
 - The headteacher is holding staff to account very well in her meetings about challenging targets and progress. She aligns this with good support and guidance tailored to individual staff's needs. This is greatly appreciated by the great majority of staff. However, she has not shied away from making difficult staffing decisions.
 - The headteacher is outward looking and her excellent links with other colleagues and staff from the local authority are used to ensure the school benefits from best practice elsewhere. The local authority has full confidence in the headteacher and provided suitable support to induct her into the school and headship.
 - The curriculum is good. It is tailored to pupils' needs with a good example being how students in the sixth form have increasing opportunities to ready themselves for life after school by having work experience, a part-time college course and a residential experience.
 - Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. They learn right from wrong as shown by their excellent behaviour. The curriculum, aided by visitors to the school and visits into the community and by the extensive charitable work the school fosters, helps pupils to appreciate the diverse experiences of other people.
 - Staff are watchful to ensure no pupil is unfairly treated. There is no discrimination in the school and pupils make similarly good progress, whatever their different needs.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is a strength of the school. The governing body is well informed about the school's work and how effective it is. Governors receive pertinent information, including that which compares the progress of pupils with other pupils elsewhere that helps them ask telling questions to check on how well the school is doing. The governors are aware of the school's performance management arrangements and its use of pupil premium funding. A report on the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding is planned for the next governors' meeting. The experienced Chair of the Governing Body has a friendly, professional and very productive working relationship with the headteacher and they share common aspirations and a determined drive to improve the school.
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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	104979
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	403776

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Porter
Headteacher	Sue Clare
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2010
Telephone number	01704 577163
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Email address	Head.merefield@schools.sefton.gov.uk

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