

Longcause Community Special School

Longcause, Plympton, Plymouth, PL7 1JB

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The quality of teaching is not always good.
- In too many lessons pupils are not learning enough. Activities are not always well matched to pupils' needs. This means that they are sometimes too hard or too easy.
- In some lessons there is too much emphasis on the completion of activities rather than on pupils' learning and teachers are not checking pupils' understanding and their application of learning well enough. Support from adults gets in the way of pupils learning for themselves and developing skills of independence and problem solving.
- The management of the most challenging behaviour of a few pupils has not been thought through enough and is not fully effective.
- Although leaders have made significant improvements to all aspects of the school, teaching is not yet good. Leaders' opinion on the quality of teaching is not accurate because the impact of teaching on learning is not evaluated effectively.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. The headteacher and governors are highly ambitious and passionate about school improvement. They have taken robust action to resolve very complex issues. They have set firm foundations on which to build.
- Progress in literacy and mathematics is improving. Many pupils are now making good progress.
- The very youngest children make a very good start to their school education and achieve well. There is some good and outstanding teaching in the school.
- The curriculum has improved so that pupils leave with better qualifications.
- Pupils feel safe in an atmosphere that is positive, calm and caring.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in parts of 17 lessons. The majority of these were jointly undertaken with either the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, senior staff, teachers, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including policy documents and school improvement plans. The school's pupil tracking data were scrutinised.
- The views of parents and carers were considered through 21 responses to the on-line parent questionnaire (Parent View), a letter to the inspection team and the scrutiny of the school's own parent questionnaires.
- Staff views were considered through the responses to 38 questionnaires.

Inspection team

Stephen McShane, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fran Ashworth

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Longcause Community Special School admits pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. In addition, most pupils have moderate learning difficulties, although a few have more severe learning needs. Many pupils have associated difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or specific learning difficulties.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for those eligible for free school meals or are looked after) is above average.
- Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in teaching staff. All of the leadership team are new. There have also been a number of changes of governors.
- The school works in partnership with other schools to access additional courses for its pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it consistently promotes good and better learning by ensuring that:
 - the intended learning outcomes for individuals and groups are clear and precise
 - tasks are relevant and well matched to pupils' prior learning or their particular needs and capabilities
 - teachers regularly check pupils have understood concepts and can apply their learning
 - questioning is well focused and there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to use their speech and language skills to communicate to consolidate and extend learning
 - support from additional adults is focused on improving learning and promoting independence.
- Clarify policies and practices for dealing with the most challenging behaviour. Ensure all record keeping is up to date and that it is regularly monitored. Regularly evaluate and review behaviour management methods used, taking into account their effectiveness and comparisons with up-to-date and best practice elsewhere.
- Strengthen leadership and management by sharpening the evaluation of teaching so that it gives appropriate weight to the impact teaching has on pupils' learning and includes the monitoring of additional adults, particularly those who are responsible for leading sessions.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Learning in lessons is variable. In some lessons pupils are busy and occupied but they are not learning enough to make good progress. Too frequently pupils complete tasks but do not deepen, apply or build on their knowledge.
- Progress for the youngest children in the school is good. Very careful challenge means that the children are developing key skills of independence and communication despite their complex needs.
- School data show that many pupils are now making accelerated progress in literacy and mathematics and are on target to reach challenging targets. The school's analysis shows that those who receive pupil premium funding are making similar progress to their classmates.
- In the best books and in the best lessons pupils show that they can now deal with more complex calculations or they can use their knowledge of letters and sounds to help them read and write at greater length and for different purposes. They are gaining new knowledge in subjects such as science at the expected rate.
- Pupils leave school with qualifications at different levels. Recently, pupils have gained a wider range of entry level qualifications in literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology and, where appropriate, GCSEs in different subjects. Students also gain qualifications related to the world of work. When they leave Longcause all pupils are successful in gaining a college place to further their studies.
- Many pupils learn practical skills through enterprise projects or cookery. Older pupils are confident in the kitchen and can use a variety of appliances, equipment and methods for cooking as well as using their reading and measuring skills when completing tasks.
- In the best lessons pupils develop skills of independence, communication, turn taking and skills of interacting and working with others. When given the opportunity pupils learn to problem solve and cope with their frustrations in a calm and effective way.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving. In the past, inadequate lessons were frequent. Now they are rare. However, teaching is not yet consistently good.
- In the best lessons the teacher is clear about the intended learning for each pupil in the session. The lesson keeps this focus and adults' questioning and support are carefully tailored to get the best learning outcome possible. Pupils, whatever their complexity of need, are encouraged to give answers or to try things out for themselves and they are given regular opportunities to reflect, to think or to correct their responses.
- In too many lessons the learning outcome is not specific. It is too frequently related to completion of an activity. It does not take into account prior learning or the particular needs of individuals. This leads to the challenge in some lessons being too high or not relevant for some pupils. Support staff then try to amend the activity but not always successfully and this leads to pupils completing work without increasing their understanding. For others the challenge is sometimes too low and pupils spend too long on low-level tasks such as copying, colouring, cutting or sticking.
- Bearing in mind that the vast majority of pupils have speech, language and communication difficulties, in many lessons, there is too much talk by adults. Questions are often too wide and too complex. There are frequent missed opportunities to develop pupils' responses more fully before the adult intervenes and talks again about something else.
- All lessons are underpinned by positive relationships between staff and pupils. There is usually at least a satisfactory pace and energy for learning and resources are suitably prepared, which means that classrooms are purposeful places to be.

- Teachers are confident in techniques such as using interactive whiteboards to support teaching and learning. They regularly mark work according to the school policy. During lessons they ask pupils to indicate whether they understand the work by self-assessing their work as they go. However, the impact of these different practices on improving learning is very variable across the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils are enthusiastic about their work. They often show enjoyment at succeeding at a challenge and mostly work hard.
- Pupils learn to cooperate effectively. In the classroom they make an effort to manage their own particular difficulties, such as calling out or being easily distracted, so that they can learn more effectively. Pupils play well together.
- Close working with parents and carers, clear expectations and a willingness to be flexible about approaches to individual pupils are leading to significant improvement in most pupils' behaviour.
- The school practices for dealing with the most challenging, and potentially violent, pupils are not robust enough. Record keeping, monitoring and evaluation of practices in line with national guidance and in comparison with practice elsewhere require improvement. Senior leaders are aware of the weaknesses and are acting quickly to remedy these issues by introducing more effective behaviour management methods.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and are well cared for. They are confident that adults will sort things out if there are any problems. The behaviour of those pupils with the most complex needs is very sensitively managed by very intuitive and thoughtful staff. They calmly engage with pupils and they are effective in reducing inappropriate behaviour to ensure learning is not disrupted and learning moves on. Such intervention helps lower individuals' anxiety and stress levels.
- Well-thought-out social learning clubs are provided during lunchtime and they offer pupils good opportunities to relax or engage in activities. The clubs are a key ingredient in helping to create a calm working environment during the school day.
- Pupils contribute greatly to the welcoming feeling of the school. Overcoming their communication difficulties, they greet visitors and are happy to show their work or discuss how proud they are of their school and are keen to talk about the different activities that they enjoy.
- Pupils are aware of bullying issues and the different forms that bullying might take. They have a well-developed sense of why different people might be bullied and what should be done to stop it.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Since her appointment the headteacher has worked tirelessly to improve the school. She is clear, firm and reflective. She has taken difficult, and at times unpopular, decisions. The impact of her work is clear. There is significantly less inadequate teaching. There is better progress. Pupils leave with more qualifications. The vast majority of staff who responded to the questionnaire say that they are proud to work at the school.
- There is regular evaluation of the quality of teaching by senior staff. Some of these evaluations do not give enough weight to the quality of learning that takes place in lessons. This leads to judgements that are too generous and self-evaluation being inaccurate. In addition, evaluations do not yet include sessions led by adults other than teachers.
- There is a clear programme of tailored support in place for teachers who need help. This has brought about significant improvement for some individual teachers. This improvement was confirmed by observations during the inspection.
- The new senior leadership team are enthusiastic, knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility and are hard working. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of

pupil tracking, in the moderation of work and in the analysis of data which leads to further targeted work, including intervention. Detailed school improvement planning is in place which is regularly reviewed to ensure the effectiveness of actions.

- The curriculum has been transformed. There is considerable emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills. Key Stage 4 pupils in particular benefit from a wider range of accredited courses as well as opportunities for individuals to learn at other schools if courses are not available at Longcause. Specialist approaches for communication and interaction difficulties have been introduced. Pupils receive counselling, speech and language and occupational therapy as required.
- Detailed tracking of individual pupils ensures that any pupils or group of pupils at risk of underachievement are soon identified and interventions are put in place if appropriate. Planned curriculum opportunities, for example for the small number of girls in the school, ensure that their particular needs are suitably met. The school works hard to provide equality of opportunity and to be inclusive. The school promotes pupils' social, moral, social and cultural knowledge well through a variety of themed days, visits, and links with institutions such as different places of worship and schools, nationally and internationally. Discrimination is not tolerated and is appropriately tackled if it occurs.
- Child protection and recruitment procedures meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides some effective support such as training opportunities for governors and human resources support. The school improvement advisory service regards the school as requiring light touch support only.
- **The governance of the school:**

It has improved considerably since the last inspection. The governing body is very ambitious for the school and its pupils. Governors are well informed about the school's performance and quality of teaching through clear reports from the headteacher and from their own regular and focused visits to classrooms. They attend regular training and are now more knowledgeable so that they can appropriately challenge the school. They have supported the headteacher well to carry out difficult decisions, particularly related to staffing and performance issues, in order to bring about necessary changes. The high expectations and drive for improvement mean that roles and responsibilities are clearer and this includes ensuring that teachers are subject to rigorous performance management and those paid on the highest levels take more responsibility, including supporting other staff. Effective teachers are rewarded and any underperformance is suitably tackled. Governors ensure that there is sound financial management and that health and safety are given appropriate attention.

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	113650
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	401382

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Bell
Headteacher	Anne Thorne
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 September 2009
Telephone number	01752 336881
Email address	longcause.school@plymouth.gov.uk

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