

Pitcheroak School

Willow Way, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6PQ

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The starting point for all pupils is low because of their wider disabilities or special educational needs but they do very well and many make progress at a faster rate than that found in many similar schools.
- There is careful monitoring of individual progress and the learning needs of each pupil is taken into full account. If the progress of any pupil slows down new approaches quickly address the problem.
- The best teaching reflects the high expectations of teachers who know their pupils very well and encourage them to do their best.
- The sixth form is good and since virtually all pupils remain at school to the end of Year 13 they are enabled to leave with qualifications and good preparation for their futures.
- Some pupils arrive with very challenging behaviour but effective behaviour management helps them develop more positive attitudes so little learning time is lost.
- Senior leaders show clear vision and lead by positive example. The new headteacher is extremely well supported by her deputies and is sustaining the school's positive ethos.
- Strong management support for all staff enables them to do an effective job and to develop their skills over time.
- Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities well and hold the school to account for its performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Opportunities for developing links with other special schools and for supporting local mainstream schools are not yet fully developed.
- Within the school's leadership the role of key subject leaders is not fully developed, so they do not have opportunities to see their subject being taught, or offer the best help and support to colleagues teaching their subject.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a total of 15 lessons, which allowed them to see every classroom teacher.
- They looked at pupils' work throughout the school. A meeting was held with the school council and inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school throughout the inspection.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and staff responsible for family liaison and outreach work, the Chair of the Governing Body and other representative governors, and with a representative from the local authority.
- There were few responses from the on-line Parent View questionnaire. The school itself had sent out a very similar questionnaire a week before the inspection was announced and the 16 responses received so far were taken into account in gaining the views of parents.
- The views of staff were gathered from discussion throughout the inspection as well as from the 50 returns from the staff questionnaire.
- A range of documents was scrutinised including information to show the progress and achievement of pupils, teachers' planning and assessment, the school's analysis of its own strengths and areas for development together with its priorities for the future, and key policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rowena Green

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pitcheroak School is for pupils with a range of moderate and severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and other increasingly complex learning and communication difficulties.
- Two-thirds of the pupils are boys.
- No pupils are supported through school action because all have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding that in this school is for pupils believed to be eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority) is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic communities, or who speak English as an additional language, are both below the national average.
- Students in the sixth form are able to benefit from attending the local college of further education and from work placements on a weekly basis as part of their course.
- The new headteacher took up post on 1 September 2013, six weeks prior to the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Promote links with other schools and develop the school's expertise in supporting the inclusion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in local mainstream schools.
- Expand the role of subject leaders in the leadership of the school by enabling them to:
 - undertake classroom observations when their subject is being taught
 - model their good practice to other teachers
 - support other teachers through developing in-house training
 - make sure that the needs of those with the greatest learning difficulties are fully met.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment is low because all have special educational needs. There is a wide range of ability in the school and over time needs have become more severe, particularly in the area of communication difficulties and complex needs.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding well below those found generally. They make good progress because teachers understand their needs, and their achievements are monitored carefully. The style of Early Years teaching continues for as long as necessary to prepare pupils for studying the National Curriculum.
- From their individual starting points pupils make good progress throughout the school, gaining national accreditation by the time they finish Year 11 and again in the sixth form. A majority make better than expected progress measured against the national progression guidance that is used by special schools.
- Sixth form provision is equally good and virtually all pupils remain at school to benefit. A focus on independence skills for life after school is promoted through weekly college and supported work placements that supplement a range of opportunities to gain external accreditation.
- Individual progress is monitored in detail, as is that made by identified groups of pupils. When a pupil fails to make expected progress different programmes of support are used to get the pupil back on track.
- The information on the progress of identified groups shows that there is no difference in their outcomes, including that of boys and girls, or pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. This reflects the commitment of the school to promoting equality of opportunity.
- Sometimes work for pupils with the most severe needs is too difficult and they find tasks too hard. Key subject leaders do not currently have opportunities to make sure that work is always appropriate. Achievement is therefore not yet outstanding.
- The pupil premium is allocated effectively, enhancing performance in English and mathematics for those who are eligible and supporting their access to wider opportunities, such as the summer play-scheme. Provision includes one-to-one learning support and the acquisition of new resources, including computer programs, to accelerate progress. The use of Year 7 catch-up funding is similarly used to enhance achievement.
- Physical education is a priority and a specialist teacher is currently in school. Planning for the new funding to promote sporting activity is being targeted at developing sporting collaboration between local special schools to enhance participation.
- Reading is promoted effectively and this is supported well by the use of phonics (the understanding of letters and their sounds). Computer programs and a range of new materials have enhanced resources. Many pupils enjoy reading at school and at home.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most subjects, including English and mathematics, is usually good, with some that is outstanding. This enables most pupils and groups of pupils to make progress in all areas of learning that is at least in line and very often better than that found in similar schools.
- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is effective. The school identified that previously the teaching of mathematics was not so good and has worked to address this successfully by introducing additional support for pupils who were found to be falling behind. Work on enhancing the communication skills of many pupils is particularly impressive and enables some with severe learning needs to make excellent progress.
- Teachers plan very carefully, taking individual pupil needs into account and working closely with teaching assistants to create very effective teams in each class. This creates a high level of individual support so needs can be met and pupils helped to make the most progress.
- More-able pupils are able to show progress that is at least good, but occasionally the needs of those with the greatest learning difficulties are not met so well because tasks are too hard. Teaching is therefore not yet outstanding. Generally, though, learning is based on current achievement, helping pupils to make good progress and meet their challenging targets.
- Teachers have high expectations and because they form positive relationships with their pupils there is a climate of hard work and positive achievement. Pupils' understanding is often checked and reinforced by good questioning from teachers, reflecting effective professional skills.
- The best teaching is inspirational, such as a Year 10 art lesson where pupils had learned about the style of painters like Picasso and went on to produce large, bold paintings of their own exhibiting ability and confidence. The lesson ended with an extremely effective discussion in which pupils analysed their work in a mature and thoughtful way.
- Work is marked and assessed regularly and teachers are skilled in monitoring the small steps of learning that are the norm. This is true from the first days in Reception right through to the end of the sixth form and teachers regularly help pupils to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Some pupils first enter the school with behaviour that is extremely challenging but the school's effective behaviour policy, coupled with the generally calm and purposeful atmosphere, helps pupils to adopt more positive attitudes. As a result little time is lost to learning in lessons.
- In the very few lessons where there is any low-level disruption it is as a result of teaching that fails to engage pupils. This explains why behaviour cannot yet be seen as outstanding.
- Over time this small school has become a place where everyone gets on together and is respected. Pupils look after each other and support each other well, including the older pupils acting as buddies for the younger ones. Pupils made the inspectors feel very welcome.
- Parents, staff and pupils all say that the school is a safe place where attitudes encourage learning and disruption is rare. While staff are trained in the use of restraint there is a stress on calming incidents to prevent trouble breaking out. This helps create a happy atmosphere and a positive learning environment.

- Pupils know that bullying in its different forms, including cyber-bullying, is very unpleasant but they say that because everyone gets on so well it is not an issue. When there are any incidents in school, pupils confirm that staff deal with them quickly and effectively. Pupils are also aware of the dangers of misusing social networking sites.
- Care is taken to make sure pupils are safe when they are out of school, such as on work placements or at college.
- Pupils enjoy school a lot and their attendance is much higher than that found at many special schools. There have been no permanent exclusions for several years and the use of fixed-term exclusions is far lower than the special-school average.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has already made a very positive impact. There continues to be a clear vision for taking the school forward. The senior leadership team are focused on making this a school where pupils achieve their very best and in doing this have strong support from staff, parents and carers.
- Leadership is not yet outstanding because the role of key subject leaders is not fully developed. They do not have enough opportunities to observe their subject being taught by colleagues, to model best practice, lead professional development or share advice on how all pupils might be effectively challenged to achieve their best.
- The school had identified that it has a greater potential for forming collaborative links with other local special schools and for helping mainstream schools to enhance their support and inclusion for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Checking of the school's work undertaken by senior leaders is effective and fits into the system for annual objectives set for teachers to support their professional development. It also covers a careful analysis of teachers' planning and the achievement of their pupils.
- Teachers understand the links between pay and performance and those with additional allowances willingly undertake extra responsibilities.
- The range of subjects meets the needs of pupils, including new provision to support the needs of those with the greatest difficulties around communication. This is enhanced by trips and visits, including opportunities for residential experiences.
- There are many opportunities to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. This is seen in the school community in the extremely positive social relationships that exist, while at a global level it is seen in the school's receipt of the International School Award and the links with a school in Tanzania.
- Links with pupils' homes are strong and well supported by the family liaison officer, reflected in the positive support that parents give the school. Workshops are held to support parents and the school has been awarded the Parent Partnership Award.
- Similarly effective links support working with other professional agencies, including those concerned with safeguarding, so this provision is very effective. The local authority supports the school well, for example during the appointment of the new headteacher.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body carries out all its legal duties, including those for safeguarding, and keeps up to date through regular training. Governors know about the achievement of pupils and are about to enhance this further through attaching individual governors to specific subject leaders. They know what is going on in teaching and understand the links between teacher performance and pay, including the tackling of underperformance. Governors work well with an external consultant to set challenging annual objectives for the headteacher which they monitor carefully. They have a good understanding of funding arrangements, with good support from the school's finance manager. This includes the way in which the pupil premium is allocated and the impact it is having in raising the attainment of eligible pupils.

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	117056
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	426906

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	4-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Gale
Headteacher	Sheila Holden
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2010
Telephone number	01527 65576
Fax number	01527 67845
Email address	office@pitcheroak.worcs.sch.uk

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