

Pathfield School

Abbey Road, Pilton, Barnstaple, North Devon, EX31 1JU

Inspection dates 10–11 December 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders have made sure that teaching is good and an increasing proportion is outstanding. They believe that 'every moment matters'.
- All groups of pupils achieve well and make good progress because of the good teaching and interesting curriculum. Some children in each year group achieve exceptionally well.
- Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage provide the children with a very good basis to their school life, making rapid progress.
- The sixth form (post-16) provision is outstanding and prepares students very well for life beyond school.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well and safely because of the expert attention they receive.
- Leaders check frequently on pupils' progress and teachers' performance. They provide support, guidance and assistance, where required, so that the school keeps on improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Staff do not always use signing where it is needed to help pupils understand what is being said.
- In lessons, teaching assistants are not always given sufficient responsibility for tasks such as continually assessing how well pupils are doing against their individual learning targets.

In some lessons, pupils do not gain knowledge and skills rapidly because they do not complete as much as they are capable of in the time available.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 10 lessons, involving 10 teachers, all of which were jointly observed with the senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, other staff, members of the governing body, a local authority representative, and five parents.
- Inspectors had discussions with pupils, both individually and as a group.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own information about pupils’ progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and pupils’ books and files.
- There were insufficient responses to the online survey, Parent View, to be analysed. Inspectors also took account of 55 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Bob Arnold

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pathfield School is an all-age Foundation special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism spectrum disorders.
- The school is part of a trust, formed in August 2012, with all 10 Devon special schools working in partnership with the Co-operative College and the local authority.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families) is high. A high percentage of eligible pupils are in the care of the local authority.
- Apart from the main site, the school has additional classroom accommodation closer to the town centre that is used for pupils in the post-16 provision.
- A few pupils attend the neighbouring Pilton primary and secondary schools, accompanied by school staff. There is no other off-site provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that a higher proportion of pupils make outstanding progress by making sure that:
 - all staff make full use of signing to support what they say where this is needed
 - all staff keep up the brisk pace in lessons, challenging pupils to get more done in the time available
 - teaching assistants are always given sufficient responsibilities in the classroom, for example, for assessing how well pupils are doing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' learning difficulties and complex needs mean that attainment is low. Nearly all pupils achieve well and meet their individual targets. In each age group, some pupils make exceptionally good progress.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid progress, because staff are very skilful in helping the children to acquire the necessary understanding and social skills.
- Students at post-16 make exceptionally strong progress because staff expect a great deal from them, helping them to make their own choices and use their initiative.
- All pupils make very good progress in literacy because of recent improvements to the teaching of reading skills. Pupils make good progress too in numeracy. They learn how to carry out various calculations, including using money and devising their personal budgets.
- Throughout the school, all pupils achieve particularly well in personal, social and health education, and this can be seen in their very positive attitudes to learning and to each other.
- Pupils with learning difficulties build up their basic skills well and many learn to read and to write independently. Their communication steadily improves, although staff sometimes forget to use signing where this would enable the pupils to make even faster progress.
- The school has recently introduced new specialist ways of teaching pupils with autism. These are having a major positive effect. Pupils are learning very quickly how to cope with their worries and improve their relationships with others.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make good progress because the teachers make effective use of a good range of sensory strategies and resources such as the light room.
- Pupils' progress in science has not been as strong as in English and mathematics. The school has recognised this and has arranged for teachers to incorporate routinely science into other lessons, for example in outdoor learning in the Forest School.
- The school uses the extra funding from the pupil premium well to provide eligible pupils with additional opportunities to develop their creative, communication and interaction skills. All eligible pupils make as good, and occasionally better, progress than other pupils.
- The school uses its Year 7 catch-up money well to provide drama activities and for specialist staffing for the programmes with pupils with autism. This year group achieves as well as other year groups.
- The school has made good use of its additional funding for primary school sport to increase pupils' participation in sporting activities by employing a specialist coach and widening the range of activities.
- There is little difference in the achievement of any group, including boys and girls and those from different backgrounds and circumstances. This endorses the leaders' commitment to equality of opportunity and that 'no child is left behind'.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers quickly gain a very good understanding of each pupil by carefully recording pupils' successes in order to calculate the next small steps that each pupil needs to take in their learning. Classroom staff provide good role models in showing respect, courtesy and commitment to everyone's well-being. With such good models and work set at just the right level, pupils remain interested, listen carefully and behave impeccably.
- The good teamwork between adults, including therapists and medical staff, supports the pupils' behaviour and learning well. Teaching assistants know the pupils' targets and how to help pupils concentrate and learn. In a few classes, opportunities are missed to give teaching assistants additional responsibilities, for example in assessing pupils' progress.
- Teachers pitch questions at different levels to check that pupils have understood and to keep them on task. They give pupils encouragement and praise when they have done well. In the

best teaching, pupils receive constant, specific feedback so they know exactly how they can improve further.

- The school's mantra for teaching is 'every moment matters'. The school leaders are good at recognising where teaching is outstanding, and are successfully increasing this proportion.
- Where teaching is extremely effective, for example in the specialist classes for pupils with autism, there is a high energy in the interactions between staff and pupils, activities are precisely structured and tailored for each pupil and learning is at full pelt.
- A few teachers have not yet reached this level of excellence and their teaching requires improvement. For example, pupils do not complete as much as they are capable of in the time available.
- Pupils who need a lot of support in communicating and understanding are sometimes held back because staff do not make enough signs and gestures to support their speech, or expect pupils to sign back to them in turn.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage the teaching and resources strongly support learning and development, and records clearly show that children make good progress. Staff give a priority to pupils' communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. Children have free access to outdoor learning, where staff have set up an attractive area with further activities.
- The post-16 provision is outstanding and a strength of the school. The staff team focuses all activities on the students' gaining of independence, using their initiative and developing adult social skills. All students at some point experience work training and some students attend on their own, using public transport.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- There are exceptionally strong relationships and trust between staff and pupils. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in class are usually excellent. Parents and carers, staff, external agencies and pupils report that they are very happy with pupils' behaviour and the way it is managed.
- There are a number of pupils who have great difficulty in maintaining self-control when they get upset. The school devises detailed plans so that staff know exactly what they need to do when this happens. Staff carry out the plans very expertly, with sensitivity and kindness, so that pupils are able to return to learning quickly. Records show that the number of these incidents reduces very quickly.
- The school leaders understand that pupils' emotional and social well-being requires a consistent approach from both home and school. In order to achieve this, the school has appointed two liaison workers who provide support to families as needed.
- Pupils very much enjoy learning, attending well and doing their best to succeed. Pupils are friendly and enjoy each other's company. Parents report that their children cannot wait to return to school after long holidays or even after weekends.
- The school fosters friendships well with children from the local primary and secondary schools who come in regularly to socialise and give help with reading. All the pupils love these opportunities and there is much fun and uproar as they sit on the sofa and laugh at old 'Scooby-doo' programmes together.
- Students at post-16 support each other very well, helping out where necessary and delighting in each other's successes. No matter what their difficulty or level of communication, all students participate fully in the local community, for example when they go shopping for elderly people who have difficulty in getting out.
- During the inspection, the whole school walked very safely down to the local church in central Barnstaple to attend a carol service. The pupils showed exceptionally good behaviour, with an excellent awareness of road safety, by quickly responding to staff and presenting no danger or disruption. No child had to be told off or held back.

- Discussions with parents and pupils and the school's records show that anti-social behaviour, such as bullying, is very rare. All pupils say that they have someone to whom they would turn if they had a personal problem.

The leadership and management are good

- The governors and school leaders have a commitment to equality of opportunity and excellence so that the pupils become as well informed, healthy and socially successful as they can be.
- The headteacher is very well liked and respected by all parents and carers, pupils and staff. Her commitment to improving each pupil's life chances is unwavering and she has the whole staff behind her, as is evident from the overwhelming support given to her leadership in the Ofsted staff questionnaires.
- The school regularly seeks the views of parents and carers, staff, external professionals and pupils to check that they are happy with the school's work, and what improvements are required.
- All staff foster strong partnerships with families and external organisations, to the benefit of the pupils. For example, the school provides good accommodation on the site for health and social services professionals, who are then nearby should their services be required.
- The school has a good partnership with local schools and colleges, whose pupils undertake work experience at Pathfield as part of their social care courses. The school, together with another nearby special school, provides a much-valued outreach service to local mainstream schools, giving support to mainstream staff and governors, for example with communication, planning, behaviour management and differentiation.
- The school knows itself very well. Leaders know where improvement is required and have set detailed plans to achieve this. The school has worked very hard over the past few years, bringing about good achievement, excellent personal development and resolving all the issues raised in the previous inspection.
- The governors and senior leaders have seen to it that managerial responsibilities are very well spread throughout the school. Leaders of the different key stages are very effective, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage and post-16 provision.
- Some support staff have leadership responsibilities, such as for the sensory curriculum and resources, the library and reading, which they carry out very well. Teaching assistants are not always given important responsibilities within the classroom, such as for small groups or assessment.
- Senior leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' learning, so that they have an exact view of the school's and individual staff members' strengths and weaknesses, and how these influence progress and learning.
- Pupils of all ages take pleasure in the rich and interesting range of activities and subjects, which contributes significantly to their good achievement and excellent behaviour and personal development. The school has forged close links with a school in Kenya in order to increase its awareness of other cultures. The curriculum offers many opportunities for creative opportunities and the school has won a national award for its singing.
- Opportunities for spiritual development abound in many of the lesson activities. Circle time in the Early Years Foundation Stage, for example, is a moving experience, as the children, many of them very new to the school, sit in silence and reflect for several minutes, passing around an electric candle.
- The school receives proportionate support from the local authority, which is given on the basis of requests from the school. Active support is being provided through its membership of the trust, involving partnership work with all Devon special schools as well as the Co-operative College and the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**

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- The governors have made sure that all statutory duties are met, including those to safeguard pupils. They have a tight control on the school's finances, and have undertaken recent training on how to judge teaching and how to improve the performance of staff. Members of the governing body keep themselves very well informed by receiving detailed and helpful reports from the headteacher and school staff and by their frequent visits to see the school's work at first hand. In this way they have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know about any staffing difficulties, the quality of teaching, and pupils' achievement, including those pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. The governors use this information to discuss staff promotions, what is being done to deal with underperformance and how extra pay is being allocated to staff with additional responsibilities. The governors have helped to develop strong links with the community, particularly in the way they have raised local awareness of disability issues. Senior leaders report that the governing body always robustly challenges them about the school's work.
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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	113638
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	428845

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeannette Kemlo
Headteacher	Claire May
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 February 2011
Telephone number	01271 342423
Fax number	01271 323252
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