

Victoria School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103601
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	286700
Inspection dates	7–8 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	138
6th form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Barnes
Headteacher	Jim Kane
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2001
School address	Bell Hill Northfield Birmingham B31 1LD
Telephone number	0121 4769478
Fax number	0121 4112357

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Victoria School is a large special school catering for a wide range of pupils who have complex learning difficulties ranging from moderate to profound and multiple learning difficulties. Nearly all pupils have physical disabilities. Some pupils have multi-sensory impairments, and the school is a regional resource for these type of pupils. Approximately 20% of pupils have life limiting conditions. The school gained specialist schools status for the Arts in February 2007. It has a diverse social and economic catchment area. Nearly half the pupils are eligible for free school meals and a similar number have English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Victoria School is a good school, with some excellent features. It is vibrant, with extremely committed staff who work hard to promote pupils' self-esteem, independence and communication skills very effectively. The school has a positive 'can do' attitude, where pupils are given many opportunities to enhance further their excellent personal development. As a result, pupils develop their independence skills exceptionally well. For example they are used to making choices at lunchtime and being as mobile as possible. They make their views known very effectively on a range of subjects through the school council, such as healthy eating and the dangers of wheelchair speeding. They are valued and respected as individuals and in turn pupils demonstrate a strong caring attitude towards each other. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and hold it in extremely high regard. One parent commented 'Victoria is a great school, with amazing staff who demonstrate incredible sensitivity, expertise and understanding towards the children.'

Although standards are exceptionally low due to the nature of pupils' disabilities, the good teaching, which is sometimes outstanding, is a key factor in the good progress that pupils make. Achievement is good. Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage, and more able pupils successfully transfer to mainstream schools. Pupils achieve very well in science and the creative arts such as drama, music and art and these are strengths of the school. They make good progress in achieving their objectives in their individual education plans in numeracy, literacy, personal development and mobility. Pupils receive an outstanding curriculum, which is creative and imaginative, and this helps to make learning fun and interesting for all pupils. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well looked after and the integration of medical and therapeutic inputs is carefully planned to ensure that disruptions to pupils' learning are minimised. The needs of all groups of pupils are successfully met, including those with multi-sensory impairments and those with degenerative conditions. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has built a successful school team and has worked hard to improve the school. Currently, the setting of whole-school targets to measure pupils' progress is not consistent enough. The school does not make enough use of wider information, so that where appropriate, it can compare the progress of pupils in similar schools. The successful bid to gain specialist school status for the arts has given the school a real boost and there is an air of excitement and confidence for the future. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students in the sixth form benefit from good and sometimes excellent teaching and they make good progress. They receive a rich variety of experiences. The sixth form promotes students' independence very effectively in a more mature setting. They achieve well in a wide range of externally accredited vocational courses. Less able students gain accreditation in courses designed to prepare them for their next phase of adulthood, such as preparing meals, and personal safety. Some students consolidate and generalise their skills in a range of different situations. Students are developing their skills in using technology to control their environment such as opening a door or turning on light switches. Other students learn to express their preferences and take turns in sensory lessons. New assessment procedures for students are being developed to map their progress against milestones for older students.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Refine whole-school target setting so that it is more consistent and rigorous throughout the school.
- Where appropriate, make better use of comparative assessment information so the school can demonstrate more clearly how well pupils make progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good, although standards are exceptionally low, due to the severe and complex nature of pupils' learning difficulties. Most pupils are working well below National Curriculum levels. A significant number of pupils have degenerative or life limiting conditions.

Understandably, this slows their progress and some pupils make minute steps of progress. However, this represents good progress for these individual pupils. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress in developing their mobility, play communication and cooperative skills and learn letters of the alphabet through rhymes. Pupils with multi-sensory impairments make equally good progress in important areas of mobility, orientation and developing their understanding and communication skills. In music, for example, they are enthralled by the vibration of a drum or enjoy beating a rhythm in time. Some learn to make better use of their residual senses to allow them to access the wider world. Most pupils achieve their individual targets and some exceed these. However, the whole-school setting of targets is inconsistent and this makes measuring progress accurately more difficult. At Key Stages 3 and 4, a few more able pupils have not achieved as well as had been predicted, although some had spent time in mainstream schools developing their social skills. There is no significant variation in the progress of pupils by gender or ethnicity.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They really enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is excellent. The vibrant school council makes its views known assertively on suggestions of how to improve aspects of the school. Attendance is satisfactory as some pupils are absent from school for long periods due to medical difficulties. Pupils understand the importance of eating healthy foods and the need to take regular exercise to keep fit. Their personal safety is enhanced as they learn to travel and move around the school safely and independently. Older pupils learn the skills required for employment through exciting enterprise projects. For example, post-16 students run a school coffee shop, having to apply for the jobs and attend an interview. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Opportunities are numerous for pupils to cooperate with each other and their behaviour is excellent. Collective worship activities provide valuable opportunities where pupils discuss and reflect on issues, for example, when a peer recently died. Pupils enjoy learning about different cultures through music such as a visit by a Zulu tribe, who sang and danced with pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching is consistently good, and sometimes it is outstanding, and this enables pupils to make good progress. Lessons are well planned to meet individual needs, including the setting of challenging individual 'small steps' targets for pupils. Teachers know their pupils very well and give them ample time to respond. Teachers and support staff are skilful in incorporating pupils' medical and therapy needs into lessons. They make good use of sensory work, so that pupils are fully engaged and motivated in lessons. For example, in one lesson, the sensation of rain was created through using mist sprays, and other pupils enjoyed playing parachute games. This lively approach ensures that teaching is vibrant, lessons are exciting and pupils receive good stimulating experiences. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic and they enjoy learning immensely.

Alternative forms of communication, such as the use of photographs, symbols and synthesised speech devices, are used very effectively, although not all teachers use signing often enough. Teaching is particularly strong in science and the performing arts where good subject knowledge is delivered in a lively manner. Some of the classrooms are small and cramped and this restricts teaching in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school has an excellent curriculum that is broad, balanced and relevant, which is carefully planned to the needs of all pupils. The work-related curriculum for older pupils is very good and enables them to increase their independence and prepares them well for the future. Further opportunities are currently being developed through extending the range of accreditation for lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 4. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and citizenship is excellent. The Foundation Stage curriculum is stimulating and varied and, where appropriate, it prepares pupils well so that they can transfer to mainstream schools. Music, art and science are particular strengths of the curriculum. Pupils are given excellent opportunities to experience and participate in the performing arts. The specialist school arts status further builds on this expertise. Visiting artists and musicians, such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, enriches the curriculum. The school has developed an excellent curriculum specifically for pupils with multi-sensory impairments.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are excellent. Each pupil is treated with care and respect. Health professionals and education staff work closely together to ensure extremely high levels of care and so that disability is not allowed to be a barrier to learning for pupils. Staff understand the needs of all the pupils very well and use creative and imaginative thinking in positioning pupils to move independently and to feed. Child protection procedures are robust and regular training

is provided for all staff to ensure pupils' well-being is paramount. The school works closely with parents. This link is significantly enhanced by a designated member of staff who ensures that communication and support between home and school is very effective. One parent said 'The school is supportive and the staff understand our needs. We are encouraged to call into school at any time.' Individual targets guide pupils very effectively in their learning. They are clear and precise and set out relevant and challenging small steps for them to succeed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The experienced headteacher provides good, confident leadership and management. There is a strong commitment by all staff to the school and the vision for the school is widely understood and shared. Monitoring is thorough. The school has developed a good understanding of its potential to develop further and of areas needing improvement. The headteacher is eager to constantly improve the school. Examples of this are the improvements to some of the accommodation and the successful bid to gain specialist status for the Arts. Ambitious targets have been set for this initiative, although it is too soon to judge the impact of these. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has developed a very strong group of middle managers who have a good grasp of their respective key stages. They have started to use assessment information effectively to inform planning. For example in Key Stage 3, assessment information has been used to pinpoint where pupils needed additional individual support and this resulted in them making better gains in their progress. The school recognises that inconsistencies in the setting of targets limit its effectiveness in keeping an overview of pupils' progress. The school does not make enough use of comparative data to allow it to compare the progress of pupils in similar schools, where appropriate.

The school has excellent links with a wide range of schools and these are used effectively to optimise inclusion opportunities for pupils, where appropriate. The committed governing body also has a good understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. Their procedures for monitoring the work of the school are thorough with each member having an area of the school improvement plan for which they are responsible.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Victoria School, Northfield. Birmingham. B31 1LD

We enjoyed our visit to your school recently. Thank you for meeting with us, particularly to the school council who put forward their views with such confidence.

We think your school is a good school and you said how much you liked it. All the school staff work very hard to make sure that your lessons are interesting and that teaching is just right for you. You are taught well and staff make learning interesting and fun. The school is particularly good at teaching you arts, such as music and drama, and this should get even better with the new Arts status the school has gained. Your personal development is excellent. Many of you are doing very well in becoming more independent and taking on some areas of responsibility, such as running the school coffee shop. You make good progress in your learning. We liked how well you worked hard in lessons. The subjects and activities provided give you excellent opportunities for learning. The school takes a great deal of care to look after you extremely well, so that you can do as well as possible. Your headteacher is doing a good job and he is always looking at how things can be made better.

To make the school even better, we have made two suggestions.

- The targets that the school sets should be more helpful, so it knows how well everyone is doing.
- The school could make better use of information about similar pupils to yourselves, where possible, so that it can measure how well you are doing.

Best wishes

Frank Price Lead Inspector