

# Uffculme School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103605
<b>Local Authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	286702
<b>Inspection date</b>	14 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Julia Coop

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	113
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	D Thomas
<b>Headteacher</b>	A MacDonald
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2001
<b>School address</b>	Queensbridge Road Birmingham B13 8QB
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 4645250
<b>Fax number</b>	0121 4642207

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Uffculme is a day special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Since the last inspection there has been an increase in the proportion of younger pupils starting with more complex learning needs. A very significant proportion of the pupils are non-verbal or have severely restricted communication skills. Many have associated medical and other additional needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. The school serves a wide, socially mixed area and more pupils than usual are entitled to free school meals. It is a multicultural school. The main ethnic groups are White, Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani. Many come from homes where English is spoken as an additional language. The school has a healthy school award. In May 2007 it was chosen as a 'School in Focus' by the DFES for the innovative ways it is responding to the unique needs of the pupils.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Parents greatly appreciate this school. Written comments such as 'the school far exceeds the expectations that any parent could have' are echoed by almost all. The school is excellent. It provides outstanding care, support and guidance not only to the pupils, but also to parents. The school leads the field in many areas of its work. An innovative, nationally acclaimed toileting programme, especially adapted communication package and detailed individualised positive behaviour strategies, all of which are accessible to parents who may not speak English, are just a few of the ways that the school excels and goes out of its way to work in partnership with parents. As a result the school ensures that their children make excellent progress in their personal and social development and well-being. The school has been acclaimed for its work, which has been published in leading journals. This could not have been achieved without excellent leadership and management.

The headteacher and senior managers are highly ambitious. They collectively inspire staff to improve and develop their skills for the benefit of the pupils. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The school has a strong and highly skilled team of teachers and assistants, who are equipped with a considerable range of skills and specially adapted resources to ensure that from the moment that they start in the Nursery, children of all backgrounds are enabled to excel. Although the pupils' difficulties mean that their standards of work are well below national averages, their achievements are excellent. Increasingly children are starting in the Foundation Stage with ever more complex learning needs, but by the time they move to Year 1, most have already made significant strides in their ability to relate to the staff and use simple communication aids. This very good start forms the basis for continued and rapid improvements. By the time pupils leave in Year 6, from a low start, some have reached national expectations in literacy and mathematics and all are able to communicate in a variety of ways. This, together with a wide range of interesting and additional activities, makes a significant contribution to the development of their confidence. As a result, pupils are very successfully equipped for the future because they are more able to interact socially with the world around them.

A major plank in the school's extremely successful teaching approaches is the unique and highly effective assessment system, which pinpoints pupils' developmental levels and tracks their progress in fine detail. This information is used very carefully to plan highly individualised learning programmes and outstanding curricular experiences. This is another key reason for pupils' excellent progress. However, whilst effective, this monitoring system produces a wealth of paper evidence which is time consuming to collate, complex and not easy to unpick. In addition, whilst the school is rising to the challenge of meeting the needs of children who are starting with more complex needs very well, it does not yet liaise with other specials schools in order to help them moderate their assessments of these pupils' learning. Consequently, the school is modest in the evaluation of its performance. It is self-critical, has made continuous improvement and is forward thinking and thus very well placed to maintain and develop even further, but the current monitoring systems are not streamlined and sharp enough to ensure that high standards can be maintained as the school welcomes an increasing number of pupils with more complex needs.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Work with other special schools to moderate the performance of pupils who join with more complex needs, and streamline the use of data in order to make monitoring of learning even more efficient as the profile of the pupils changes.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

Although standards are low, pupils' achievements are excellent and they make enormous progress. As a result, the school's value added data place them in the top 5% of all special schools nationally. This is because from the time they start in the Nursery, pupils receive highly focused individual support, care and guidance as well as teaching and a curriculum that are extremely well matched to their individual needs and preferences. In particular their communication, reading and writing skills are boosted enormously by the school's own carefully designed pre-phonics literacy programme known as 'A Visual Approach to Teaching Early Literacy' and Picture for Object Trading (POT), which take an innovative, unique and finely graded approach to the development of early communication skills. As a result, children who start in the Nursery with little or no verbal communication become confident communicators and some go on to reach expected National Curriculum levels. The highly visual materials overcome any barriers to learning; consequently the pupils who come from homes where English is not spoken also make great strides. Progress in mathematics and other subjects is equally as strong because resources are very carefully adapted to make each small learning step interesting and meaningful. As a result, most pupils build up their knowledge of different concepts and reach the very challenging targets set for them.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

Pupils' personal and social development is a central focus of the school's work, and as a result their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school is a harmonious and very friendly place because it works hard to ensure that pupils celebrate and value each other's faiths and cultures and they readily celebrate the achievements of others. It is clear from the pupils' happy faces around the school and the way that younger children, for example, delight in making shapes with their bodies hidden under a large piece of Lycra, that they all really enjoy school. Pupils increasingly realise the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Those who have school meals take advantage of healthy menus and most of the older pupils stay for an after-school sports club. Where pupils have a restricted diet, because of the rigidity of autism, they are gently encouraged to try healthier options.

Pupils are extremely proud of their school and relationships throughout are excellent. Many pupils display high levels of anxiety when facing different situations and can often have an impaired sense of danger. However, the pupils are helped enormously to understand their different emotions and how to keep safe, for example through the use of carefully adapted pictorial Social Scripts. As a result, many are able to take themselves to the calming areas when they feel stressed or agitated and also use these skills when at home. Despite their difficulties the pupils make an active and very successful contribution to the community. There is an active school council. Older pupils support the younger children at various times such as playtime and lunchtime. In addition opportunities to use the specialist facilities in the community, to attend

art lessons and socialize with mainstream peers or, where appropriate, to use money, ensure pupils are being very well equipped with the skills they will require in their future lives.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled at planning exceptionally well to challenge and support all groups of pupils. Skills in using a wide variety of communication aids are very well honed. Activities are very brisk and no moment is lost to support and guide learning. Specialist approaches have been very carefully adapted to provide highly structured teaching methods which are very relevant for pupils with autism. This has resulted in the pupils' communication and comprehension skills being developed very effectively. Excellent teamwork ensures that the pupils receive constant support and help yet, where appropriate, pupils are skilfully and sensitively enabled to make choices and work independently. Teaching is lively and enthusiastic and interactive whiteboards, specialist facilities, programmes and therapies such as Hatha Yoga ensure that pupils are helped enormously to make excellent progress in academic, personal and social terms.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The personalised and very carefully adapted curriculum is a considerable strength of the school. It has been developed over 10 years to ensure that pupils are taken on a highly successful learning journey from the very earliest sensory and communication experiences to working within National Curriculum levels. A very well planned programme of personal, social and health education is carefully woven through this curriculum, successfully promotes pupils' personal development and self-esteem, and ensures their safety, health and well-being. Excellent links with other schools and after-school clubs, including sport clubs, have enabled the school to provide a very good range of social and physical experiences for the pupils. A raft of visitors including a local artist, who helped pupils design costumes and masks for a community carnival, a dancer from Birmingham Royal Ballet and coaching staff from a local football club, together with the educational and residential trips, greatly enrich pupils' learning. All of these experiences and many more help them enormously to become increasingly sociable and communicative young people who are more than ready for the move to secondary education.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

The excellent care provided for pupils is based on the high level of commitment from staff, the very effective communication with parents and robust arrangements for safeguarding pupils. A striking feature of the school is the trust the pupils have in the staff. Guidance on learning is also good and where appropriate pupils are involved in reviewing their progress and sharing their views and opinions. The result is happy, confident pupils who really love school. All staff are very effectively trained and alert for signs or symptoms of distress and take appropriate action. One of the main reasons why this school is outstanding is the way that it has developed many innovative programmes to support pupils and parents alike. Examples of these are the nationally recognised programme for Toilet Training, developed with an incontinence charity, which greatly enhances pupils' personal hygiene, and the very carefully adapted social stories

which contribute to reducing anxiety and impact positively on improving challenging behaviours. There are many other excellent arrangements for supporting parents and pupils including specially designed packs and workshops as well as support for parents who speak English as an additional language. Parents, without exception, say this is a very caring school and one commented that 'the school is like part of our family because they help us so much'.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding drive and determination of the headteacher, senior staff and governors have taken this school on a dramatic improvement journey over the last 10 years. There is a self-critical culture and they are never content to stand still. Consequently they are always looking to improve and adapt the school's processes and policies for the benefit of the pupils, who are at the heart of the school's work. Professional development is very carefully matched to staff training needs and this ensures that everyone has the ability to put into practice these varied and highly effective strategies. It is no wonder that this school is outstanding and has received national recognition for its innovative and unique work to increase pupils' level of understanding and skills. The school has reached out to other schools to share ideas and practices and harnesses partnerships with parents and other agencies extremely well for the benefit of the pupils, although it has yet to work with other similar schools to moderate their assessment of the pupils who are arriving with more complex needs. In addition, the school's managers recognise that in its keenness to keep a very close eye on pupils' progress, in some respects it has gone overboard in producing a wealth of paper to do so. Consequently, it takes a considerable amount of time to produce by hand all the graphs and charts and to monitor pupils' learning. This makes it more difficult for them to pinpoint and fine tune their planning, which they know is essential as the school begins to change direction to work with pupils with more complex needs.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

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

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

Dear Children

Inspection of Uffculme School, Birmingham, B13 8QB

We very much enjoyed our time with you and would like to thank you for helping us to find out about your school. There were lots of things we liked.

- You really enjoy being at school and love learning.
- We think the curriculum and teaching are outstanding and help you learn very well.
- Everyone looks after you extremely well.
- We think that you must have a really good time in all the extra activities.
- Everyone works very hard to make Uffculme an excellent place to learn.

There is one thing that we want the staff and governors to do to ensure Uffculme stays an excellent school:

- The school should look at how well some of you are doing compared with other schools and simplify the way it keeps a check on how well you learn.

We hope that you go on enjoying learning and trying hard and we wish you all good luck for the future. It was a real pleasure to meet you all.

Julia Coop Lead Inspector