

Longcause Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113650
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	289684
Inspection date	16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	86
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joy Davenport
Headteacher	Mike Jelly
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	Longcause St Maurice Plympton Plymouth PL7 1JB
Telephone number	01752 336881
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school provides for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, although an increasing number have complex communication difficulties associated with autism. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. The school serves the City of Plymouth and the region of west Devon. The socio-economic background of pupils is varied, with 25% of pupils being eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background. Since the last inspection there has been a substantial building programme in the school. A 'new' wing has been added that includes specialist facilities for a number of subjects, and some parts of the 'old' school have been changed. The local authority's (LA's) multi-agency centre has been sited on the campus. The school is in a very advanced stage in bidding for specialist status in sports and the arts.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Longcause Community Special School is a good school with some outstanding features. Since the last inspection, outstanding leadership and management by the headteacher, over a time made difficult by an extensive building programme, has helped secure outstanding progress for pupils in the way they develop as young people, and good progress in their learning. Uniformly, parents are very supportive of the school and describe it as, 'Brilliant' and 'Being so good for my child.'

The relationships between pupils and the staff are excellent and these help pupils feel safe and secure, and very happy and comfortable, at school. First-class care and guidance, aided by the support of the many specialists from the multi-agency centre, means that pupils develop their personal and social skills outstandingly well in growing to be as independent as possible. They behave impeccably, attend very regularly and enjoy taking a full part in all that the school offers, including the lunchtime and after-school clubs and the residential visits. They are polite and friendly, are a delight to be with, and flourish both as learners and young people.

Standards are well below average because of pupils' difficulties with learning, but in most of the subjects pupils achieve well and they do outstandingly well in mathematics, art and physical education because of outstanding teaching. Overall, though, teaching is good because planning for learning is, generally, good. In a few lessons assessment data is not used well enough in guiding planning and in these lessons pupils do not always achieve to their capabilities. Teachers and the learning support assistants are skilled at using specialist strategies to promote learning and to communicate with pupils in different ways and, because of this, all pupils, including those with the most complex difficulties, make the same good progress. The curriculum is good and pupils learn what is right for them. They are given many additional learning opportunities that give them an excellent preparation for their life after school. For every leaver over the last three years this has meant continuing their education at local colleges.

The headteacher and the senior leaders have very high expectations for the school and they know their school pretty well. All key issues from the last inspection have been addressed and, with the completion of the new building, the school is exceedingly well placed to move further forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment information more effectively so that all pupils achieve well in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Parents and carers are delighted with the progress their children make. Detailed records kept over the last three years show that, generally, pupils make good progress against their targets and the rate of progress compares favourably with emerging national data for equivalent pupils. The outstanding progress they make in mathematics, art and physical education is linked closely to excellent teaching that routinely meets the learning needs of all pupils. Progress in information and communication technology (ICT) is only satisfactory. This is because the excellent 'new' computer facility has only just been completed and, over the time of the building programme, staff and pupils have had to make do with old and malfunctioning equipment, which has had a deleterious effect on their progress. The good progress made by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is

easily seen in their successes on an appropriate range of nationally accredited awards, from the entry level of the GCSE to the ASDAN bronze award, which, collectively, reflect the full extent of their learning over their time at school. Pupils are prepared very well for the next stage of their lives and the school is justifiably proud that, for each of the last three years, all leavers made sufficient progress in their learning and in their personal and social development to continue their education at local colleges.

There is no evidence that there is any group of pupils, for example, boys or girls, those with the most complex needs or those who have the highest capability, which underachieves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils are a delight. They behave outstandingly well and are open and friendly and show a notable degree of self-confidence and self-esteem. This is because they develop excellent relationships with staff which help them make outstanding progress in their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents are quick to recognise the importance of the school in helping their children grow up to be as mature and responsible toward becoming as independent as possible. Pupils enjoy school very much. This shows in their good attendance, and in the happiness and laughter that is regularly seen in lessons and throughout the day. They make a full contribution to the life of the school, formally through the school council and also by taking a full part in all that the school offers, especially the lunchtime and after-school clubs and the extensive programme of residential visits. With good support, they learn how to handle equipment safely. They are aware of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles and of the importance of staying fit and eating healthily. The very well-established links with many local businesses help them develop and practise their social skills in an adult environment; the older pupils gain a good knowledge of the economic demands of the adult world from taking part in the extensive programme of work-related learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The very well-moderated programme of lesson observations shows teaching to be good over this last year, with many lessons judged as outstanding. Teaching and learning are getting better because the excellent new specialist facilities for art, design and technology and the studio for lessons in drama, music and dance are allowing teachers to plan for raising individual achievement, without having to deal with the restrictions previously imposed by the small size of some of the classrooms and the limited range of specialist equipment. The new ICT suite is a much better base for teaching and learning and the interactive whiteboards that have been located in each classroom are beginning to be used well in making learning in the subjects more interesting, through the use of sound, colour and movement. There is some evidence that achievement is being raised in each of these subjects beyond the good levels seen last year in most of these subjects.

Teachers and the learning support assistants are good at using specialist strategies, for example, the Treatment and Education of Autism and related Communication - Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and additional communication strategies, such as picture exchanges and the use of symbols and signs. Teachers plan well and, in most of the lessons, learning is relevant to pupils

because it is built on prior knowledge and the targets for new learning are clear. This is especially so in the lessons in art, mathematics and in physical education. In a minority of lessons, learning is constrained because the targets for learning are not clear to pupils and sometimes they do not match well enough with pupils' learning needs.

Pupils show they are comfortable as learners through behaving excellently in lessons and by working hard to do their best. They enjoy lessons and take pride in showing their completed work. The opinion of one pupil reflects that of most: 'In this school, Sir, learning is fun.'

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is relevant because it focuses on making pupils as independent as is possible, whilst meeting national requirements. It successfully concentrates on improving basic skills and on developing pupils' personal and social skills. The curriculum has some outstanding features. It is broadened by a very wide range of enrichment opportunities, such as the after-school clubs in rowing, zone hockey and running, the many lunchtime clubs and by the regular opportunities pupils have to take part in residential visits in this country and in France. Programmes, such as the independent travel programme, the work experience programme and the extensive links with local colleges provide very valuable additional opportunities for pupils to develop and practise their personal and social skills. The close link with a local high school allows pupils to take part in a very broad range of physical activities. These provide excellent opportunities to increase their levels of physical fitness, to recognise the need to be active as part of a healthy lifestyle and to become proficient in their chosen activities, so that they can continue them after they leave school. Pupils regularly demonstrate their capabilities over a wide range of sports by being successful in competitions against local schools and, occasionally, in national competitions.

The good progress they make in their learning and the outstanding progress they make toward being as independent as is possible is testament to the quality of the curriculum. But higher standards could be achieved if the curriculum were made more cohesive. For example, opportunities are missed to link the recommendations of the national strategies in English and mathematics to learning in the other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The provision for safeguarding pupils' health and safety is outstanding. All aspects of care are treated very seriously. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and child protection procedures are robust and known by all staff. Pupils are extremely well cared for and are safe in lessons and throughout the school. Parents are delighted with the way their children mature, linking this with the 'can do' approach of the school.

Siting the multi-agency centre at the school provides great benefit to pupils because specialist support, especially speech and language and physiotherapy support, is easily provided, as is the use of specialist equipment. This is particularly helpful in improving the communication skills of those pupils with the most complex needs, so that they gain the same access to their learning as the others. Preparation for knowing about the world of work is very good. Older pupils gain very clear guidance on possible careers and an awareness of work through the very well-planned programme of work experience. The transition links with local colleges are also very well established. Pupils in Year 11 visit local colleges for one day a week to take part in

'taster' courses and by the end of the year know the courses they wish to follow. The success of this link is reflected in the considerable success former pupils gain as college students.

Target setting to promote personal and social development works very effectively. Target setting for learning in the subjects is very good generally, although for a small number of pupils the targets are not quite as clear as they could be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is a dynamic and visionary leader who strives to develop the school so that all within, pupils and staff, have every opportunity to show how capable they are. As a result, pupils develop outstanding independence and make exceptionally good progress in some subjects. They are also improving standards in those subjects blessed with new specialist facilities. The senior leaders provide excellent support to the headteacher and, collectively, they make an outstanding team. Governance is good, and because of the strength of the senior leadership team, the capacity to improve is outstanding.

There are many examples of decisions that leaders have made that have had a significant impact on extending and improving the quality of the provision, even given the difficulties of having to run the school when it resembled a substantial building site. Securing the multi-agency centre on the school's site provides substantial benefit to pupils because a wide range of specialist support is regularly on hand. Providing a raft of training courses for parents, and for teachers and learning support assistants in other schools, showcases the skills and knowledge of staff and helps them develop their own skills, and gaining accreditation as a training centre for TEACCH is a good example. Submitting, in the very near future, the application for specialist status for sports and the arts shows a vision and the determination to make use of nationally available resources in extending the range and quality of the provision. These initiatives, and others, have helped the school gain a number of prestigious awards, including the International School Award, the SportsMark and ActivMark awards and an achievement award.

Day-to-day, the school is calm, ordered and very well organised. The building programme, potentially, could have caused serious disruption to pupils' learning, but it did not because outstanding management ensured that pupils were always safe and secure and continued to make good and better progress in the subjects, despite the substantial disruption caused by the builders.

Leaders know their school pretty well. But they are aware that to continue to raise individual achievement overall better use needs to be made of assessment information in planning lessons so that they are always relevant to all pupils. They know, too, that by gaining even more precise information on how well pupils are doing they will be even better placed to recognise priority areas for development and to judge how good the school is.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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

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

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

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16 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Longcause School, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 1JB

Thank you for helping us find out about your unit. Mrs Onions and I enjoyed visiting you. We think that your school provides you with a good education. We were especially pleased with some of the things we discovered.

We especially liked these things:

- The way the staff care for you and support you and the excellent way you develop as young people who are polite and friendly, know how to behave well and who like to be as independent as possible.
- The way the headteacher and the other senior leaders make the school a happy place to be because it is organised very well and everyone, that is, the staff and yourselves, is expected to work as hard as they do.
- The good progress you make in your learning so that you are able to move to local colleges knowing that you can be successful.
- The good teaching you receive, which often makes learning fun and makes you want to do your best. We know this because we saw you be happy and laughing a lot in lessons even though you were working hard to do your best.
- That what you learn is right for you and that you go away to stay at places where you do exciting things that are new to you.

There are a few things that we would like to see improved:

- We would like the teachers to use all the information they have on you to plan lessons that are always right for you, and want you to continue to behave as well as you do and to keep working hard in all your lessons.

With best wishes

- Alan Dobbins
- Lead inspector