

Merefield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104979
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308722
Inspection date	10 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Henry Moreton

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	2-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	59
6th form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Hutchings
Headteacher	Ms Alison Foster
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Westminster Drive Southport Merseyside PR8 2QZ
Telephone number	1704 577163
Fax number	1704 571265

Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merefield is a school for pupils who have severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. About 20% have additional complex needs and/or regressive medical conditions. A growing number of pupils who are admitted to the school have autism.

Most pupils on roll are of White British origin. About 10% are eligible for free school meals. Some pupils are admitted from other local authorities. About 40% of pupils are in either full time or short term care.

Because of their special educational needs the attainment of the majority of pupils when they enter the school is well below the standards attained by pupils of the same age nationally.

The school has National Healthy Schools Status, the Artsmark Bronze Award and the Intermediate International Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Merefield is a good school. 'The teaching and staff support have been fantastic helping my son to achieve his full potential both in education, socially and physically. He enjoys school and the environment around him.' is typical of the comments received from parents summing up their satisfaction with the school.

The good leadership of the school has improved the quality and standard of provision reported at the last inspection. Learners' achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education are improved, the governors are more active in making the key decisions, including about spending, and the facilities for changing for physical activities and showering afterwards are now as they should be.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistent and some is outstanding. It is particularly strong for the youngest pupils. Good use is made across the school of a range of teaching strategies to promote communication skills. The climate for learning is calm and purposeful in all classes and around the building. This means that pupils of all abilities work with the confidence to try things out for themselves and develop their independence. All teachers and pupils are supported very well by their teaching assistants and other adults. This ensures that pupils receive the guidance they need to help them achieve their best both personally and academically. Staff are well trained and several are highly competent in sharing their expertise with staff in other schools.

Pupils achieve well and make good progress from the time they arrive at the school. They achieve success in national accredited basic life-skills courses and make huge strides in their personal development. This is characterised by the great enjoyment they get from attending school and by good attendance, excellent behaviour and caring relationships. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is well promoted by the daily assemblies and the extensive personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) that underpins all the school does. Throughout the school the good curriculum provides access to a range of relevant activities to suit individual learning requirements. Opportunities for pupils of all abilities to benefit from a wide range of physical activities are outstanding.

Pupils have a good awareness of the need to keep themselves safe and healthy and many enjoy a nutritious hot meal at lunchtime. The active school council is instrumental in initiatives such as looking at ways that more shade can be provided for wheelchair users. Pupils of all ages have regular contact with their peers in local schools and are involved in a wide range of activities with them in and out of school, including in art, dance, music and reading. These, together with their work experience in the sixth form, prepare them well for transition to adult life.

There are excellent care, guidance and support. The school has robust policies and procedures for safeguarding its pupils. Support for parents is good and highly valued by them. Another typical comment from parents is that, 'I am informed on a daily basis as to my son's activities and behaviour.' However, not enough information is provided on a regular basis about the progress pupils make against the targets set for them.

Leadership and management are good. School governors are closely involved in supporting staff and pupils. They challenge the senior managers and ensure they monitor performance. As a result the school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. However, the information gained from monitoring lessons is not used systematically to improve the quality of teaching and

learning to the same excellent standard as seen in some classrooms. The school is well placed to move forward and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress. There is good teaching with a wide range of activities. Pupils have access to work experience and adult environments. This helps to promote outstanding personal development. Pupils receive the guidance and support they need and are very well prepared for adult life. Leadership of the sixth form is as effective as it is in the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide parents and carers with more regular information about how their children are doing against the targets set for them.
- Use information from the monitoring of lessons more systematically to improve teaching and learning to match that of the highest quality seen in some classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils make good progress from the time they enter school. This is most marked in their personal development. School assessments and records show that pupils make steady gains in their overall achievements because of the highly personalised curriculum, including for learners with additional complex difficulties. Those with autism also make good progress because of the good management of their behaviour. Pupils in Years 12 to 14 achieve well in nationally accredited courses such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. These celebrate their acquisition of independent living skills. Pupils' records show their continuous success in learning across a wide range of school and other activities. Pupils' physical well-being is enhanced by plentiful opportunities to take part in sports, including swimming, horse riding and climbing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents' and learners' views, and evidence in lessons, show that pupils are very enthusiastic and get a huge amount of enjoyment from school. They work hard and behave extremely well, reacting positively to the many visitors to the school. They have caring relationships with staff. Attendance is good. There is significant growth in pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. More able pupils also develop their independence, including travelling independently to school. Teachers plan for regular opportunities in lessons for pupils of all abilities to exercise choice. Pupils are safe and take advantage of the many activities to be healthy, such as in their work in physical education, with the sports coaches, and in the physiotherapy and hydrotherapy sessions. There are many examples of learners helping one another.

Lunchtimes are pleasant social occasions where pupils interact very well with adults and each other. Pupils enjoy the outdoors taking full advantage of the play equipment to promote their physical development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good because activities are well planned to match the individual needs of pupils and to cater for the diverse range of abilities, learning difficulties and personalities. Communication aids and symbols are used skilfully. The younger pupils get off to an excellent start where some teaching is outstanding. Staff have a very secure understanding of the learning and social needs of pupils. Lessons focus on developing pupils' practical skills by involving them well, supported by good use of resources. Teachers and support staff work together well and are good role models. Lessons are lively and interesting and hold pupil's attention throughout. Effective use is made of ICT in lessons and when visiting the local learning centre. Daily incidents and events are communicated well to parents through the home-school diaries. Assessment is effective with pupils' progress well charted, though it is not reported on regularly to parents.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There is an extensive range of activities which very effectively meet the very diverse needs of the pupils. There is a well balanced timetable, covering all nationally required subjects, and the attention given to pupil's physical well-being is outstanding. A range of school trips together with visitors to school provide variety and interest as well as the very necessary practical and sensory experiences. These are celebrated well through displays around the school. During the inspection, for example, pupils of all ages were totally captivated by the performance of African drummers. Excellent links with other schools provide further enrichment. The improved accommodation such as the science room and the new classrooms is having a positive impact on provision and pupils make good use of the school grounds.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Staff provide excellent welfare and pastoral care. There are clear procedures and systems for staffing checks with a single central record in place. There are robust risk assessments for class based activities, all journeys and visits. Appropriate staff are trained in the safe administration of medicine. Accurate assessments and records are made of pupils' performance, social skills and medical needs. Individual learning and behaviour plans are reviewed regularly and annual reviews are carried out effectively. There are extensive links and liaison with other agencies and professionals and these are becoming increasingly effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Well led by the headteacher, and based upon effective school self-evaluation, teachers respond creatively to the needs of pupils. Very effective systems are in place for training and supporting staff, including those new to working with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The observation of lessons by managers is accurate. However, their findings are not used systematically to improve learning further. Governors make a good contribution. They have an accurate understanding of the school's work because they have links with classes and clear responsibilities, though their feedback on their visits lack formality. The school hosts many trainees from other professions to the benefit of pupils.

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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>	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?	2	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	
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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
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	3	

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?	2	2
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

Inspection of Merefield School, Southport PR8 2QZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when Mrs McIntosh and I visited your school. I am writing to let you know what we found out. It is based on what you and your parents and carers told us as well as what we saw for ourselves in the school. We would especially like to thank the school council for being so helpful on your behalf.

Yours is a good school. The teachers and staff care for you extremely well and they work closely with people from other agencies to find the best ways of helping you. You do really well in gaining confidence and self-esteem because you listen so well. You make good progress because of your hard work, the skills of your teachers and the many staff who support you and them.

The school provides many opportunities for you to take part in exciting activities and we like the way that you have so many chances to experience working with children from other schools and also all the great sports you do such as horse riding, swimming and climbing.

It is hard for us to see how the headteacher, her staff and the governors could do more. Even so, we have asked them to make the school even better by letting your parents and carers know on a more regular basis how you are doing. We saw some excellent lessons so we have also asked your teachers to share even more with each other what really works well for you.

We wish you all the best for the future.