

# Pathfield School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113638
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	311319
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Andrew Redpath HMI

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>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	100
6th form	23
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jeanette Temlo
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rod Conway
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 October 2004
<b>School address</b>	Abbey Road Pilton Barnstaple EX31 1JU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01271 342423
<b>Fax number</b>	01271 323252

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<b>Age group</b>	3–19
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Pathfield School is a special school providing education for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and those with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The proportion of pupils with more complex needs has risen in recent years. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and their home language is English. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and about two thirds are boys. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The sixth form is located in a separate building approximately one mile from the main school site. The school's catchment area includes Barnstaple and the rural area of north Devon.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Pathfield School provides a satisfactory standard of education and some aspects of its work are good. Pupils' personal development and the quality of care they receive are good. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and particularly like taking part in the physical education activities, visits and residential trips. Parents hold extremely positive views about the work of the school and especially appreciate the sensitivity and understanding shown by staff towards meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the words of one parent, 'The school is warm, welcoming and friendly'.

Teaching is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers are generally successful in providing pupils with a variety of activities in lessons, which captures their interest. Pupils make satisfactory progress. However, assessment information is not used consistently in all classes to set precise targets linked to pupils' next steps in learning. This means that some pupils are not challenged enough and this limits their progress.

The headteacher is successfully leading the school through a period of change. The school has established strong links with the local community and offers valued outreach support to pupils in mainstream schools. In recent years, provision for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) has been extended, whilst the proportion of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) has increased. Staff are adapting the curriculum to meet these additional demands.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities have changed recently and they are not yet involved sufficiently in monitoring the school's work. This leads to inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning between classes. Issues identified in the last inspection report have been tackled and the school demonstrates satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good. The separate location enables students to feel they have progressed since leaving the main school site. Students benefit from good teaching and a carefully organised curriculum appropriate for their age. As a result, they make good progress. Activities include the development of basic skills, work experience, the fostering of independence and social skills, and the use of community sports and leisure facilities. This work is very appropriately based on the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The needs of students coming up through the school are changing and more students have PMLD. The present provision is not adapted to meet fully their physical and medical needs. A few students with PMLD are currently taught in the main school, which limits social contact with their peers.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Good links with other professionals and parents ensure children settle well. Children are happy to attend and the quality of teaching and care is good. Effective communication between staff and parents ensures important information is shared and any concerns are followed up quickly. Whilst children benefit from

occupational therapy and physiotherapy, inadequate space for outside play limits their opportunities for physical development.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Extend facilities for outside play in the Foundation Stage.
- Make suitable plans for sixth form provision to meet fully the needs of students who have PMLD.
- Make consistent use of assessment information to set targets that provide suitable challenge for pupils in all lessons.
- Strengthen the monitoring roles of senior leaders to ensure that good teaching and learning are consistent across the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Pupils' standards are below national levels because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school uses 'P' scales (performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with special educational needs working towards the first level of the National Curriculum) to record progress. The reliability of assessment information varies and the school is currently strengthening its accuracy. Data and the quality of pupils' work show that pupils are reaching higher 'P' levels over time and that they are making satisfactory progress. The understanding relationships between staff and pupils enable many pupils with PMLD to improve their ability to communicate through gesture and expression. A few pupils who are more capable attain a GCSE level pass in art each year by attending the neighbouring secondary school. Targets in pupils' individual plans include therapeutic and educational aspects of their learning. However, these are not always used to inform lesson planning closely enough and so their effect on raising standards is limited.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

'My child looks forward to school every morning' is a typical comment from parents. Pupils' positive relationships with staff ensure they feel safe and valued. As one explained, 'Teachers are your friends'. Pupils' behaviour is good because of the school's effective methods for managing any anxious behaviour. The school does not exclude pupils. Attendance is below the national average but when pupils' medical needs are considered, it is good. The school is successful in promoting pupils' healthy lifestyles and has gained the Healthy Schools Award in recognition of its work. Pupils engage in a broad range of physical exercise, which includes physiotherapy, Sherbourne movement sessions, dance, hydrotherapy and swimming at the local leisure centre. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthy food and those who have eating difficulties have their nutritional intake checked regularly by a paediatric dietician. Pupils learn to conduct themselves safely in the community with appropriate levels of support. This is promoted

particularly through the personal, social and health education curriculum and the independence and home management programmes in the sixth form.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils pause for reflection when they say grace before lunch. Weekly 'praise assemblies' are used to recognise achievement and celebrate festivals of different cultures. Pupils take responsibility and make a positive contribution when they take the register, pour drinks at snack time or raise funds for charity. The school has plans to set up a school council for pupils to express their views and take decisions more formally. In preparation for leaving, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their numeracy and literacy skills. Students in the sixth form speak proudly of their achievement in completing work-experience placements.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well and establish trusting relationships with them. They use Makaton signing, pictures, symbols, switches and objects of reference effectively to help pupils' communication. Routines are firmly established in all classes, which are particularly helpful in reducing the anxiety of pupils with an ASD. Stressful behaviour is managed sensitively to avoid unnecessary confrontation. There is often an element of fun and enjoyment in lessons, for example, when pupils play musical instruments or take part in a movement session. Skilled teaching assistants provide a good level of support, often taking responsibility for groups as well as working with individual pupils.

Assessment information is not used effectively to plan in all lessons and targets for pupils are sometimes too broad. This leads to activities which do not always build on pupils' previous learning and so they do not provide the right level of challenge. Further, the evaluation of lessons often focuses on what pupils have done, rather than on what they have learned. The school is aware that the use of assessment is an area for development and has plans to improve its effectiveness.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

An appropriate curriculum, which is based on a recognised approach, is in place to meet the needs of pupils with an ASD. This involves developing an individual programme which focuses on the skills, interests and needs of each pupil. Pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and PMLD benefit from a suitable sensory curriculum, which includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy, music therapy and hydrotherapy. Curriculum planning is generally in place for the current term. Longer-term planning does not yet ensure pupils in mixed-age classes cover different topics as they move through the school. The school is currently reviewing and extending its curriculum planning. Strong links with the community enable pupils to attend part-time at local schools, both individually and in groups. Pupils enjoy the residential trips and day visits which enrich the curriculum.

## Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school provides a caring environment. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and staff have had appropriate training in managing challenging behaviour, manual handling and child protection. All staff have had checks to ensure they are suitable to work with children. The school benefits from a range of therapy support which ensures pupils' medical, physical and health needs are met fully.

Academic guidance varies between classes across the school. It is good in the sixth form where students discuss their targets each week. Occasionally, however, the work of more capable pupils is not marked in sufficient detail to help them to improve.

Parents particularly like the recently introduced 'pupil-centred review' system for reviewing pupils' progress. They feel it provides a thorough consideration of their children's achievements and future needs. The communication between school and home through the 'home-school' books helps to share information effectively. Parents also appreciate the training the school provides in augmented communication.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The headteacher provides good leadership and is at the heart of the school's caring ethos. His warmth and understanding of the particular needs of pupils and their families are greatly appreciated by parents. 'This is a very parent-friendly school' one parent commented. The commitment to high quality care is shared by staff at all levels. All pupils are included in the life of the school and benefit from its strong links with the wider community.

Senior leaders are committed to ensuring the school maximises the potential of all its pupils. Several leaders are still developing their roles and responsibilities, and their involvement in monitoring the school's work is not yet developed fully. The school sets suitably challenging targets although data are not yet analysed to compare the progress of groups of pupils who have different special educational needs. The school has a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. Suitable plans are in place to take the school forward and the priorities are appropriate. For example, the school is extending curriculum plans and reviewing how it uses assessment information.

The school makes satisfactory use of its resources. Staff benefit from a good range of training to help them meet the wide range of pupils' special educational needs. The skills of teaching assistants are used to very good effect and enhance several aspects of the school's work. The governing body provides a satisfactory level of challenge and support. It maintains close involvement in the school, particularly through regular contact between the headteacher and the chair of governors.

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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	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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

<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>	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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**

14 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pathfield School, Barnstaple, EX31 1JU

Recently, I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit very much and thought it was a happy school. Thanks to those of you who took time to talk to me about your work and life at the school.

Here are the main points I found.

- Your school provides a satisfactory standard of education and some things it does are good.
- You like coming to school and enjoy the activities that happen.
- Your behaviour is good and everyone is friendly.
- Your headteacher and other adults care for you well and help you to do more things for yourself.
- You make satisfactory progress and those of you in the sixth form are prepared well for when you leave school.
- Your parents are very pleased with the school.

I have asked the school to do four things to make it better.

- Improve the outside play area for the youngest children.
- Make sure the sixth form can meet the needs of all of you who are over 16 years of age.
- Check that you are set the right level of work in all lessons so you can make better progress.
- Make sure that the good things that happen in lessons are shared across the school.

You can help by always trying your best and by talking to teachers about your work.

Best wishes

Andrew Redpath Her Majesty's Inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector