

# West of England School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113652
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	311324
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Denise Morris

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
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	63
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Robin Rhoderick-Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tracey deBernhardt Dunkin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 November 2001
<b>School address</b>	Countess Wear Exeter EX2 6HA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01392 454200
<b>Fax number</b>	01392 454200

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a non-maintained specialist boarding and day school for pupils with visual impairment. The profile of the school is changing and many pupils have additional disabilities including profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school caters for pupils from several different local authorities and provides an outreach service to Torbay. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have both been appointed in the past two years. The school shares a very large site with a College for pupils over the age of 16.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school, which is improving. It provides a very special education for the pupils, all of whom have little or no sight and many with very challenging needs. The excellent ethos of care and support among the whole school community enables pupils to thrive and develop into mature young people. 'The school makes an exceptional difference to the lives of these children', commented a parent. Pupils' enjoyment of school life is outstanding as is their awareness of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles. They take part with enthusiasm in all that the school has to offer. Their good personal development is shown in the way they come to school regularly, in their good behaviour and in their positive attitudes. It is also evident in the excellent way in which they work to support local charities. Pupils show good levels of independence as they move around the school, often showing visitors the way. In lessons however, independent learning is less successful when too much is done for them. The ways in which older pupils support younger ones, and pupils with a little sight guide those who are blind, are exceptional.

Pupils across the school achieve well. Their progress in their personal skills is particularly good resulting in high levels of confidence and self-esteem. Pupils achieve particularly well in English, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and in French, which they really enjoy. Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. The achievement of pupils with complex learning difficulties is good, as demonstrated by the positive way in which a group of multi-needs pupils responded to a session on their resonance boards. Pupils achieve a good range of GCSEs and other external accreditation by the time they reach Year 11. Just occasionally, pupils' achievements are limited because planning does not help them to know what they need to learn by the end of the lesson.

Teaching is satisfactory overall although there are many examples of good and outstanding teaching. Recent changes to the profile of the pupils attending the school mean that some teachers lack confidence to teach some groups of pupils, particularly in mathematics, and at these times the pupils' achievement dips. Appropriate training is taking place to address this. New systems have been introduced to help teachers plan their lessons more effectively but the effectiveness of planning is not yet consistent across the school. As a result, pupils are sometimes unclear about what is expected of them. The good curriculum provides some exciting opportunities for all pupils to improve their personal as well as their academic skills. Pupils are extremely well cared for by the whole school community. They are kept safe and secure and many of them know the importance of using safe working practices. The support given to them in and around the school is of a very high quality. Academic guidance is good and is improving due to the introduction of a new assessment system that is beginning to have a positive impact on teachers' understanding of what pupils achieve.

The new leadership team is strong. It is establishing good systems to monitor the work of the school. The Principal has a very clear vision for the future and knows what needs to be done to improve provision further. She is very ably supported by the relatively new Deputy Principal. Together they have introduced significant restructuring to staffing and the way in which the school monitors and evaluates its work. These have resulted in good improvement and a clear view of the school's own strengths and areas for development. Middle and senior managers are committed to the same purpose and have clear roles and responsibilities. Governors are helpful, supportive and challenging, carrying out their duties diligently and securing good financial management. Parents are supportive of the school's work.

## **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

### **Grade: 2**

Provision for boarding is good and complements the work of the school well. Provision complies well with the National Minimum Standards. The 24-hour curriculum provides a good range of exciting activities for pupils in the evenings, for example during the inspection pupils were going off to Exmouth on a visit to walk along the beach. They talked excitedly about other recent visits to the local community. Staff take very good care of the pupils and systems to keep them safe are rigorous. Relationships in the boarding houses are very positive resulting in good personal development for pupils. Sometimes groupings in the houses mean that pupils do not have a friend of their own age and ability with whom to talk and share activities. The provision in the residence supports the work of the school well and fully supports the overall achievements of the pupils.

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

- Improve teaching, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that the quality of planning is consistently good and pupils know what they will be learning and why.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn independently.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

All groups of pupils make good progress during their time at the school. This results in pupils achieving well by the end of each key stage and a good range of accreditation by the time they leave the school in Year 11. Although standards are well below average, individual and groups of pupils achieve well because of very positive support and through some exciting activities. Those with profound and multiple learning difficulties benefit from good sensory experiences that are successful in encouraging them to respond by smiling, vocalising or moving. Pupils' achievements in their personal development are particularly good resulting in high levels of confidence. They develop into mature young people by the time they enter the college. Pupils achieve challenging targets and extend their skills consistently. Achievement in mathematics is not as good as it is in English, science and ICT partly because in some lessons pupils do not know what they are expected to achieve.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' very good personal development is a result of the school's strong provision. Securing pupils' well-being is a central role of both the school and residential settings and has a very positive impact on their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents report that their children enjoy school and this is evident in all areas of school life. Pupils behave well, have positive attitudes and attend well, showing consideration for each other and support around the school. Any inappropriate behaviour is managed effectively by staff who minimise disruption. Pupils' attendance is good. They rapidly gain in confidence and self-esteem because their views are listened to. Through the school council pupils are able to develop responsibility and, indeed, their views recently influenced a staff appointment. Pupils support their local community exceptionally well through their own radio station, fund-raising for charities, recycling and having a representative on the Youth Parliament. The value of healthy lifestyles, linked to both diet and physical exercise, is well understood by pupils. Pupils are well prepared

for post-16 living, although in some lessons they could be offered more opportunities to work independently. Inclusion is a strength and the personalised programmes, complemented by a range of skilled therapists, make learning more accessible to pupils. Pupils further develop their independence through the mobility programmes that support their visual needs well.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Lessons are undertaken in a very supportive atmosphere, with the positive relationships in class and good range of activities contributing to pupils' good learning and attitudes. However there is variability in the quality of teaching which ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. Teaching in mathematics is not as consistently strong as in English, science and ICT. Too much emphasis is sometimes placed on describing the activities that pupils will do rather than on explaining what they will learn by the end of the lesson and why and planning is not always detailed enough. Teachers know pupils well and pitch questions at an appropriate level to check on understanding and to deepen thinking. Work mostly matches pupils' needs and so they achieve well. Teaching assistants play a key role in how well pupils learn. Those pupils with more complex learning difficulties benefit from the individual attention they receive and from the use of sensory resources. Opportunities for pupils to work independently are built into lessons though occasionally too much is done for them. Teachers give useful verbal feedback to pupils and are particularly good at encouraging them to strive further by pointing out strengths as well as areas for improvement. Assessments of pupils' work are well recorded and used effectively when planning further work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Pupils enjoy a varied curriculum, which is enabling them to achieve well in both their personal and academic education. There is appropriate emphasis, begun in the primary curriculum, on learning social skills such as considerate behaviour and good manners while eating, skills that are developed further as pupils grow older. As a result, the school prepares pupils well for life in the wider community. Staff have recognised the changing level of pupils' needs on entry to the school and the nature of what is taught has been adapted to assist learning. Elements of the Equals curriculum are appropriately embedded into programmes of study for pupils with complex needs, but the full impact on achievement has yet to be seen. Suitable accreditation courses are available for Years 10 and 11 pupils, though vocational education is an area currently being developed. Work related learning permeates the curriculum, with careers introduced in Year 7 and work experience in Year 10. Literacy across the subjects is strong though numeracy is less so. Planning takes into account the need to raise awareness of healthy lifestyles and adopt safe practices. Extra-curricular activities are outstanding, with pupils given many opportunities to experience activities such as residential courses locally and skiing in Colorado. The 24-hour curriculum is a strong feature of school life because links between the care and academic staff are very good.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school places the individual pupil at the heart of everything it does. Education, medical and support staff work together well to meet individual needs of all visually impaired pupils and those with additional complex needs. Each pupil has a personalised plan of activities, and targets matched to their needs and interests. There is clear consistency in the support provided to develop independence skills. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust, and risk assessments are made carefully to ensure inclusion of all pupils regardless of disability. The school has created a warm, friendly learning environment in which pupils can flourish. There are well planned opportunities to learn about the world of work, which enhance and develop pupils' confidence, preparing them well for their future lives. The school works successfully with parents and other agencies to ensure that learners make good progress. Pupils receive good academic guidance. Academic tracking is a recent introduction so the impact of this on pupils' learning is not yet as significant as it might be.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leaders and managers are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have identified the priorities for improvement correctly. These are confirmed by this report. The relatively new Principal and Deputy Principal have put good strategic planning and procedures in place to bring about improvements in all areas of the school. These have just begun to have an impact on measuring pupils' progress as they move through the school. They have also changed the staffing structures, and consequently improvements in the school and in the quality of teaching and learning are emerging. The very positive school ethos supports the special educational needs of pupils well ensuring that the pupils are well prepared for life in the adult world. Challenging targets for improvement are set and a good team approach has been developed. All leaders and managers are committed to improvement and clearly focused on improving the education of all pupils. Links with local schools are developing well and imaginative plans for future close working relationships are emerging. Good links with a wide range of support agencies result in each pupil receiving the high quality of care and support that helps them to achieve well. Governors complement leadership well by challenging decisions and encouraging debate. They play a full and active part in the management of the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and parents are supportive. The school knows what it needs to do next and has a good capacity to improve further.

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	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>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

10 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The West of England School, Exeter, Devon EX2 6HA

Thank you very much for your help during our inspection of your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about some of the exciting things you do at school. Thank you also for showing us around and helping out when we got lost. This letter is to tell you what we found and what we think the school should do to be even better.

Your school is a good school. You told us that you enjoy it and you show this by attending regularly, having very good attitudes and behaving well. You achieve well in most areas of learning and satisfactorily in mathematics. You told us about all the certificates that you receive for your good work and behaviour. You make good progress as you move through the school so that you are well prepared to go to college. You know about healthy lifestyles and you understand how to keep safe. We were very impressed by the amount of charity work that you do and are sorry we did not get to see the radio station working.

Your teachers provide some exciting activities for you to do. Teaching is satisfactory. Although some teaching is excellent, we think teachers could plan some of your lessons even better and make sure that you know what you need to learn and why by the end of each lesson. This will help you to understand what is going on and to be more independent in your learning. It will also help you achieve even better, particularly in mathematics. You have a good curriculum and some outstanding extra activities. We enjoyed hearing about some of the trips that you take.

Leaders and managers of your school take good care of you and keep you safe. They are beginning to look closely at how well you achieve so that they can help you to do even better. Provision in the boarding houses is good and helps you to learn about life after school. Staff in the residence work hard to help you enjoy your time with them and to help you learn to be independent in your daily lives.

Thank you again for your help and good luck for your futures.

Best wishes

Denise Morris Lead inspector

10 October 2007



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Lead inspector