

Pitcheroak School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	117056
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	312477
Inspection dates	21–22 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	105
6th form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Hodgkinson
Headteacher	Steve Freer
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Willow Way Batchley Redditch B97 6PQ
Telephone number	01527 65576
Fax number	01527 67845

Age group	4-18
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pitcheroak School provides for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties and for pupils with complex needs such as autism. A large majority of pupils have additional behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Pupils come from a range of social and economic backgrounds. There are currently seven pupils in local authority care. A new headteacher was appointed from January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pitcheroak is a good school that provides a high quality of education for the Foundation Stage school-aged pupils and outstanding provision for post-16 students. All the pupils and students make excellent progress in their personal development. Parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing that they will be safe and happy and that the school has high expectations of their success. One parent's comment was typical, 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds'. The school provides a high level of care and support and so pupils feel secure and well supported. They agreed, 'This is a friendly place'. They learn how to remain healthy, to keep themselves safe and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They value the school and this is evident from the very good relationships they have with staff and the good attendance of most pupils and students. All the pupils and students achieve well in their studies and a few make excellent progress. Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a good start and pupils maintain this level of progress throughout the school. The staff provide excellent support for the pupils with additional social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and those in local authority care. These pupils make outstanding progress in developing positive attitudes to learning and in their confidence to tackle new work. This underpins their good achievement. The school has significantly improved its provision for pupils with autism since the previous inspection and these pupils also make good progress.

Teaching throughout the school is good. Lessons, generally, are interesting and well managed. The pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. However, there are inconsistencies in the assessment and recording of the pupils' small steps in progress. As a result, the effectiveness of educational support and guidance is restricted because learning targets that are meant to help pupils improve their work are not clear or specific enough. The pupils follow a good curriculum and their learning is enriched by the many excellent opportunities that they have to interact with the community, such as through the excellent work-related learning programme. The school has developed excellent relationships with local colleges. This enables all Year 11 and post-16 students to work towards a range of vocationally based qualifications. The students are exceptionally well prepared for moving on to the next stage in their lives, whether it is through further education or training.

The new headteacher's considerable experience and expertise have already enabled him to exert a positive influence on the school in terms of his effective audit of provision and his clear planning for future improvements. He receives good support from senior colleagues, although he recognises the need to coordinate their work more effectively. The governors of the school have significantly improved the quality of their strategic management since the previous inspection. The school evaluates its own work accurately. It is well set to build on the good progress made since the last inspection and there is a good capacity to improve provision further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress in their personal development because of excellent procedures to help them gain experiences of adult life. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. The students continue to make good progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). They make excellent progress in developing independence skills and their grasp of work-related learning. This adds substantially

to their self-confidence. The curriculum is outstandingly well organised, relevant and interesting. It has been very skilfully adapted to the learning needs of each student. As a result, students of all abilities make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Students have a very clear understanding of how they are making progress and they build up impressive records of achievement containing a variety of certificates showing their successes in academic learning and in developing personal skills. The school has excellent links with local colleges, where students are able to achieve their potential through a range of taster courses leading to accredited qualifications.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Many of the children enter the school with levels of attainment generally well below those expected of children of this age, but they make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding, and exceptional progress in their personal development. Teachers and support staff know the children very well. They make good use of assessment and recording strategies to adapt activities to meet the needs of each child. As a result, the children enjoy their work and try their best. The classroom is a calm, happy place because the children feel safe and routines are well established. There are strong links with a local mainstream school, which enables pupils to work and play with other children. This is effective in developing their social skills and attitudes to learning. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed. There are good procedures for children's transition into the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop consistency in the assessment and recording of pupils' learning.
- Write sharply focused learning targets that always show pupils clearly how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Although standards are well below national expectations, because of the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties, pupils achieve well and make good progress. As a result, all the pupils in Year 11 successfully gain appropriate levels of accreditation and some higher-ability pupils achieve entry level qualifications in English, mathematics and science. This represents good progress for all pupils, including those with autism and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Those pupils with additional needs achieve so well because they receive excellent support in overcoming their personal and learning difficulties. For instance, pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are helped to make excellent progress in meeting challenging behavioural targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils' excellent progress in all aspects of personal development reflects the school's strong emphasis on moral and social values and pupils demonstrate this through outstanding behaviour. The pupils are very considerate to other pupils and staff; they develop a very good understanding

of the importance of healthy lifestyles and of keeping themselves safe. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying or intimidation at school and one commented, 'Well, I've never heard of any'. Pupils make a good contribution to the well-being of everyone at the school through, for example, the flourishing school council. Their good progress in basic skills and the high quality of work-related learning means that they are very well prepared for when they leave school.

Pupils know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. They make outstanding gains in their social skills because teachers provide excellent role models for them. The pupils with additional behavioural needs make outstanding progress in their willingness to participate in lessons. When pupils' behaviour on some occasions becomes unacceptable, it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the pupil involved. Parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. One parent spoke for many when she wrote, 'My child is very happy here'. This is reflected in the pupils' good and improving attendance and very good attitudes to learning, both of which have a substantial impact on their achievements. The high number of parents who returned questionnaires consistently praised the school for its positive impact on their children's lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. Teachers and their assistants work in very effective teams and they have an excellent understanding of their pupils' learning needs. Individual pupils thus receive a high level of support when necessary. As a result, pupils become much more confident in attempting new things and this has a positive impact on their achievement. Planning for lessons is generally good, because teachers work from clear schemes of work. Teachers, however, do not always efficiently record each small gain in their pupils' learning and use this information to plan clearly what their pupils are expected to learn subsequently. This sometimes slows down the pace of learning. Pupils like their teachers and the support staff, and so respond well in lessons. The management of behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils understand and respond well to the clear routines, and this assists in keeping a strong focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is an appropriate breadth and balance of learning programmes throughout the school because teachers write effective long-term plans. However, the school recognises that in some lessons the planning is not adapted well enough to meet each pupil's specific curriculum needs and, as a result, is looking at ways to address this. The pupils enhance their learning well through a range of extra activities including lunchtime and after-school clubs. There are frequent visits and events which support the pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures and teach them that new things can be learned in a variety of situations. This adds considerably to the pupils' enjoyment of school. Those with additional difficulties are fully included in activities.

Programmes in personal, social and health education have a significant impact on pupils' achievements in their personal skills. There are well-managed and effective programmes in

literacy, numeracy and ICT. The arrangements for vocational and work-related learning are outstanding. Pupils are given excellent opportunities for work experience and to follow courses which lead to nationally approved qualifications. Exemplary practice ensures that Year 11 and post-16 students experience taster courses at local colleges. This results in students becoming familiar with other places of learning and provides an excellent bridge to further study when they leave school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

There are rigorous safeguarding procedures, such as child protection procedures and checks on staff, and these help to ensure the school is a safe and happy place. The pupils make excellent progress in their social and moral skills because of very strong behaviour management and the excellent support from all staff members. This is an outstanding strength of the school. The pupils with additional behavioural difficulties clearly understand and try to meet targets to improve their behaviour. They make outstanding progress in personal skills as a result. However, teachers do not generally write the pupils' learning targets with sufficient precision to enable pupils to understand how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The new headteacher has very quickly identified key areas for improvement, not least the need to coordinate the work of senior staff better and focus more clearly on rigorously monitoring the school's teaching and curriculum. The information gathered from the school's self-review has already had a very positive impact on the way in which pupils are given challenging personal targets, but this is not yet replicated in the procedures for using targets to support and extend pupils' academic progress. The school's revised planning has appropriately prioritised issues for improving pupils' performance. Communication within the school is good and the high quality of professional training is effectively linked to procedures for managing the performance of teachers and other staff. This has made a significant contribution to improving the consistency of teaching and, in turn, the pupils' good achievement. Resources are well used and the school gives good value for money. Under the leadership of a relatively new, enthusiastic chair, the governing body is becoming effective in monitoring each aspect of the school's performance.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	2	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

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	1

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

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	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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

23 February 2008

Dear Pupils and Students,

Inspection of Pitcheroak School, Redditch B97 6PQ

When my colleague and I came to your school recently, you made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting some of you in the classrooms and at lunchtime. Thank you for your friendliness and excellent manners and the way you helped us with our work. Yours is a good school and it is obvious that you all enjoy being there because the school does lots of things well.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work, and excellent progress in developing as young people.
- You have a good range of activities that teach you about the local and other communities.
- Lessons are interesting and you are taught well. This means that you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Older students have excellent opportunities to learn skills that will be useful on leaving school. You also have the chance to attend college on a regular basis. This will help you to be more confident when you go into new situations.
- All the adults at the school look after you very well.
- The people who run the school do a good job.

Your school could be even better if the staff record even more carefully everything that you learn. This would help them to give you targets to aim for so that you know exactly what to do to improve your work.

You can help, too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing and by continuing to support each other so well.

Best wishes to you all.

Melvyn Blackband Lead inspector

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Melvyn Blackband
Lead inspector