

Holly Bank School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107796
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	324656
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Boarding provision	Holly Bank School
Social care URN	SC034415
Social care inspector	David Martin

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	34
Sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Wathen
Headteacher	Ms P King
Date of previous school inspection	March 2006
School address	Roe Head Far Common Road Mirfield West Yorkshire WF14 0DQ
Telephone number	01924 490833
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education, Learning and Skills, one additional inspector and one social care inspector. This was also an integrated inspection, where education and social care were inspected together.

The inspectors visited 10 lessons, including therapy sessions, and held meetings with the headteacher and with the senior staff in charge of the boarding section. Inspectors held meetings with the chair of governors, senior school staff and residential staff. They also talked to pupils, with the assistance of staff, and to a small number of parents. They considered the 10 questionnaires completed by parents.

Inspectors observed the school and boarding section's work and looked at development and improvement plans, records of pupils' progress, policies, and procedures relating to staff recruitment. The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at:

- the overall effectiveness of boarding
- how well pupils are achieving
- whether teaching is sufficiently well planned and delivered to engage pupils and help them to learn
- how successfully the school has addressed the points for improvement listed at the time of the previous inspection
- how appropriate the steps are that the school has identified for its further development.

Information about the school

Holly Bank School is a residential school for students with a range of severe learning and physical, and/or medical disabilities. Some students' medical conditions are life-shortening. A very small number of pupils have respite care at the school and so are registered as day pupils. Half of the students are in the sixth form.

Although the school is registered to accept children from the Early Years Foundation Stage, there are none on roll, nor have there been for some years. The youngest pupil currently is aged 11.

The school has a governing body which reports to the board of management of the Holly Bank Trust. The work of the Holly Bank Trust includes the provision of adult care. The vast majority of students from Holly Bank proceed into the adult provision when they leave school at age 19.

The school provides holistic, 24-hour care for students with specialist therapists and medical staff working alongside teachers. It was designated a specialist school for pupils with physical and sensory special educational needs, in September 2008. The school holds a number of awards, for example a BECTA Excellence Award for inclusion.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Holly Bank is an outstanding school. It is clear that students really enjoy being here and they participate fully in life and learning at Holly Bank. At every stage students are enabled to make choices about matters that directly affect them. They thrive on the respect and interest that staff give them and the excellent resources provided by the Holly Bank Trust. In this way the quality of their lives is greatly enhanced.

Caring and committed staff do their utmost to help students enjoy their time at school and their lessons at Holly Bank. Medical, care and educational staff work together to plan and deliver lessons and therapy sessions that interest students and meet their individual needs. Although students' attainment is very low, they enjoy school and their achievement is outstanding.

The curriculum is varied and imaginative and it continues to evolve. For example, through becoming a specialist school links are evolving with other schools and colleges. In this way, the school is extending the range of opportunities for students and promoting dialogue on how best to meet their needs.

The specialist school plan has set the school appropriate targets to foster better links with the local community.

The school has excellent capacity to improve: the headteacher, senior leaders and governors are inspiring in their vision and enthusiasm and they have thorough systems and records underpinning their plans for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the work towards the targets identified in the specialist school action plan, in particular in relation to the community aspect.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

The standards students reach are very low. Students communicate through sounds or through visual clues interpreted by the teacher or support assistant, including facial expressions, eye contact or very simple gestures or movements.

However, from their starting points students' achievement is outstanding. Very skilful teaching encourages them to take as active a part as they can in lessons and so small steps of progress are evident. For example, students are able to indicate when they understand something and are enabled to make simple choices. Through the assistants' notes, students' preferences are recorded. Students' expressions show when they really enjoy something, such as in the multisensory room when attracted by a particular colour or slide, students are able to press a switch to make the next thing in the sequence happen. In this way they can demonstrate that they are following the instructions. In choosing picture symbols a small group of students was able to convey to inspectors that they were happy, felt safe in school and were well looked after.

The school's records show that students make most progress in their personal development. The development of students' social skills is given a high priority. Students learn how to interact effectively with each other and with adults. The school's curriculum is closely tailored to fostering this aspect of students' education and helping to prepare them for moving into adult care. Staff provide excellent role models for students: the relationships between staff and students are outstanding. This encourages students to get involved and so fosters learning.

Every opportunity is taken through lessons and other activities to promote a healthy lifestyle: through the choice of food students and staff make or eat, the stress on personal health and hygiene and the various medical therapy sessions.

There is no unauthorised absence and students' attendance is good. The school does not analyse attendance, and therefore is not able to identify or analyse any emerging patterns.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Teaching is outstanding. Lessons are very carefully tailored to each student's identified needs and the targets that have been set for their progress. Staff frequently refer to these in conversation during lessons so that students know what it is that they are trying to do on that day or in that lesson. Students are more involved in the feedback about what they have achieved in lessons than at the time of the previous inspection.

There are good systems for assessing how students are progressing: a simple kardex system follows from the residential section through to the school so that small, specific steps of progress can be regularly recorded. Recently, this system has been extended to encompass the increasingly multi-therapy and multisensory way in which students learn. Links with a local college and with other schools are feeding into this system, so that an accurate picture of how effectively individual students are learning at all ages can be built up. Students have a record of achievement, with photographs and other evidence, including how they are progressing through P levels (below National Curriculum level) and towards their targets.

Teachers frequently use photographs or video to help them record students' progress and to evaluate how effective their teaching is. This sharing of good practice among the teachers, and increasingly with partner schools, is a strong feature of this school and reflects the school's desire to improve even further.

The curriculum is lively, varied and imaginative. Teachers, for example, have received training in multisensory approaches and the technologies of the multisensory room to bring lessons to life. Inspectors observed an outstanding literacy lesson on the theme of a walk exploring a garden in India where students could touch and smell fruits, flowers and spices from that area as a stimulus for learning. The school draws increasingly on resources and links from beyond the classroom, including with partner mainstream schools and a local college to offer a rich, interesting curriculum that introduces students to the wider world.

The support, care and guidance for students are outstanding. One-to-one dedicated support and care from teachers and assistants, and regular access to specialist therapists in school ensure that students' well-being is maximised and that their physical stress or discomfort is minimised. There are high levels of resources to support students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
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Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has engendered a strong team spirit in the school. Teachers, assistants, boarding staff, specialist medical and therapy staff all work very closely with a sense of shared purpose to make the lives of the young people enjoyable and comfortable, and to help them to learn. This cohesion in the school provides a strong sense of community. The promotion of equality is a real strength: staff transmit a 'can do' attitude to students.

The school has acted effectively on the points raised at the time of the previous inspection: risk assessments for the various practical lessons are now in place; and in lessons students are more involved in checking what they can do or have learnt.

Governance is strong. Governors have good awareness of the school's priorities and provide excellent support and strong challenge to the headteacher. Governors are keenly aware of the vulnerability of the young people in their school and take their recruitment responsibilities very seriously: procedures are robust.

The school knows itself very well and has established appropriate priorities for its future development. Senior staff have clearly delegated roles and show considerable initiative and flair in taking the school forward.

Although only recent, the specialism of the school is having a good impact. The specialist school targets underpin the school's overall improvement plan and the priorities are already being actioned. In particular, there is scope to further develop links with local schools, so that teaching expertise can be shared.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form curriculum focuses on helping students grow up into young adults and preparing them for their future life. Students follow a personalised programme that introduces them to an excellent range of new activities, including courses at a local college and a guided work experience.

Each term has a particular theme which incorporates communication, numeracy, information and communication technology, and personal and social development. Personal education is prioritised, for example to help students with everyday routines and be able to express their likes and dislikes. Female students were delighted with computerised simulations of themselves with different hairstyles and make-up. In this way the outstanding curriculum is relevant to the interests of young people, students' dignity is recognised and their self-esteem fostered.

Students greatly enjoy the weekly leisure afternoon that helps to develop their social skills: for instance, inspectors observed country dancing for students using wheelchairs.

Work is well underway with a local college through the Pathfinder project to develop a system for tracking students' progress in personal development.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Boarding provision

The boarding provision was judged to be outstanding and the National Minimum Standards were met. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

How effective is the boarding provision in meeting the needs of boarders?	1
What is the quality of the boarding experience and what impact does it have on boarders' development?	1
How effectively is the boarding provision led and managed?	1

Views of parents and carers

At the time of the inspection 10 questionnaires were received from parents. All were extremely positive and supportive of the work of the school. The following comments are typical and illustrative of the ways in which the school helps pupils to progress: 'I am amazed at the things my child can do now that she could not do before she went

there'; 'My child is far more sociable, vocal and responsive'; 'Holly Bank is a wonderful oasis, where the most vulnerable children are given back their life and future.'

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a Key Stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

27 February 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of Holly Bank School, Mirfield, WF14 0DQ

I am writing to thank you for your help when I came with Mr Martin and Mr Alexander to inspect your school. In particular, thanks to those of you who used the 'talking mat' time to tell me what you think about your school. You told me you feel safe and happy at Holly Bank and that you enjoy being there.

I can see why! We agree. We think your school is outstanding: that means we think it is super! Your parents are very pleased with the school, too.

This is what we found.

- You try really hard to listen and to learn. You are making really good progress. We can see by your smiles, and in other ways that you communicate, that you enjoy school.
- The teachers work very hard to make your lessons interesting. There are a lot of exciting things for you to do and activities to try. We liked the sensory room. And the country dancing for the older students looked fun!
- The sixth form is good. Your teachers help you well with your day-to-day personal life. The link with a college allows you to meet other young people and you can try out new courses.
- We think your headteacher is an excellent headteacher. Everyone in the school cares for you very well. We liked the way the teachers and other adults try to get your views and ideas.

Your school has good ideas for what to be doing next and we think these are sensible.

So, thank you again and keep trying your best.

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon
Her Majesty's Inspector of Education, Learning and Skills

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