

Marshlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124518
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328154
Inspection date	23 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Joyce Cox

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	51
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Goodyear
Headteacher	Belinda Whale
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lansdowne Way Wildwood Stafford ST17 4RD
Telephone number	01785 356385
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Age group	2–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

In September 2006, as part of the local authority's reorganisation, Marshlands changed from being an all-age special school catering for pupils with severe learning difficulties to a primary school catering for pupils with a wide diversity of learning difficulties. It was renamed Marshlands Primary School (Special). All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Since 2006, the proportion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) has risen to almost one half. A fifth of the pupils have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and a small number of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The school's population draws on pupils residing within a radius of approximately 10 miles from the school. A very small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and no pupil is at an early stage of learning English.

The Early Years Foundation Stage class caters for nine children aged between two and seven years. Five children are aged between two and five.

Marshlands has been awarded Healthy School status and an Activemark from the National School Sport Strategy.

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. The vast majority of parents agree: one parent wrote, 'Before coming here, I had to drag my son to mainstream school kicking and screaming, only for him to be sent home an hour later. Now I have a boy who loves school and looks forward to going every day.' A small number of parents whose children have very limited communication skills, correctly and understandably say they would like more regular information about what their child is doing and learning so that they can support the school's work at home. Inspectors agree with parents' positive and negative comments and agree that more needs to be done to keep parents informed about their children's learning. Leadership is good and senior leaders have been effective in improving the way pupils' progress is tracked. The next step is to ensure that all staff consistently use this information well to adapt their teaching and to modify the curriculum to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. Teaching and learning are good overall but some staff are more successful than others at meeting pupils' complex and varied learning and social needs. Older and more able pupils are not always sufficiently involved in checking up on their own learning.

Although standards are exceptionally low because of the pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, pupils' achievement is good overall throughout the school. Senior leaders carefully analyse information gained from assessments to monitor the progress of all pupils, including those with complex needs. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage also achieve well because teaching is good and they learn in a highly structured, supportive learning environment.

There is a good balance between teaching pupils key skills such as literacy and numeracy and exposing them to varied activities such as swimming and horse riding which enrich their understanding of the world. The carefully planned programme of personal and social education ensures that pupils make good progress in learning how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together.

Most pupils behave well. Those who are able to do so join in lessons enthusiastically and try hard. Attendance is good. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the local community. They communicate their views during circle time, at their annual review process and through the school council. Highly effective care and support have a strong impact on pupils' good personal development. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are good leaders who have high expectations for their pupils. They constantly examine and improve all aspects of the school. The well-informed governing body works closely with the school to evaluate its provision rigorously and constantly seeks innovative ways to improve it still further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's achievement is good in relation to their very low starting points, although standards reached, in relation to national expectations for children of this age, are very low. When they start school most children have little or no communication and some require toilet training. Good provision results in all children starting Year 1 with some signing and communication skills. Children are also encouraged to be as independent as is realistic for their abilities and they are encouraged to help one another because of the endless patience and perseverance of the staff. Good teaching enables all children to make good progress, particularly in their personal and social skills. Good arrangements for introducing children to the school, together with clear

routines, good welfare arrangements and strong teamwork, ensures that children become more confident. A good partnership and effective relationships are quickly established with parents. One parent commented, 'My child has come from mainstream where she lacked confidence, was very unhappy... and never slept. She is now a happy child, sleeps all night, is learning a moderate curriculum and wants to attend school.' The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed and senior leaders have identified accurately that the main area for improvement is to ensure all aspects of the areas of learning are planned, delivered and assessed, both indoors and outdoors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further adapt curriculum planning and delivery so that it effectively and consistently meets the needs of pupils with autistic and behavioural difficulties.
- Make sure all lessons are focused on meeting pupils' various complex needs and implement more chances for older and more able pupils to reflect on their own learning and make decisions.
- Extend the good links with parents by providing them with more information about their children's learning so they can play a fuller part in supporting pupils' achievement at home.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

As expected, given their complex learning difficulties, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is exceptionally low compared to that seen nationally. More importantly, most pupils make good progress and just occasionally a pupil makes exceptional progress and reaches the expected levels in national tests at the end of Year 6. Senior leaders have considerably improved the way they track pupils' progress through the school. Pupils' standards and achievement are viewed at an individual level and senior leaders have developed systems to compare their pupils' achievement with pupils from similar settings to validate their assessments. School data shows that the majority of pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and, particularly, science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most pupils behave well and consequently the school is a happy and friendly place. A small number of pupils with challenging behaviour disrupt lessons. However, staff usually react quickly so that outbursts are halted without adversely affecting other pupils' learning. Pupils readily celebrate the achievements of others in assemblies and enjoy receiving awards and praise. It is clear from pupils' happy faces and the school council's positive comments that most pupils enjoy school and say they feel safe. They particularly enjoy being outside, doing sport and going on educational visits. The school provides a wide range of additional physical activities which considerably improve pupils' self-esteem and confidence as well as keeping them fit. Some pupils enjoy attending activities such as swimming, horse riding and visiting an adventure playground. Pupils understand the importance of eating healthily and during the inspection, younger pupils enjoyed choosing strawberries, bananas or satsumas to eat at snack time. Pupils and parents are proud of their school and relationships throughout are good. Pupils make a good contribution to the school, for example through circle time and the active school council, and parents and pupils also do a great deal of charity fund-raising. A recent 'Jim Jam day', when staff and pupils dressed in their nightclothes, raised money for Children in Need. The school is careful to ensure that pupils learn as much about the wider world as their capabilities

allow, for example through using the local supermarket to buy ingredients to use in food technology activities. Learning and social skills relevant to pupils' future lives develop effectively, making them well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most staff manage pupils' behaviour well and normally a calm and purposeful atmosphere pervades the school. Good specialist teaching in art and science ensures all pupils achieve well in these subjects. However, teachers' skills in adapting their teaching to meet the complex learning and social needs of pupils with ASD and BESD vary. All staff use a wide variety of ways to support pupils in gaining the confidence to communicate. Pictures, signs and symbols are used effectively by most staff to ensure pupils are interested and want to try to communicate their ideas. Not all teachers tell pupils what they will be learning in lessons, or what their learning targets are. For older and more able pupils, this can restrict their achievement as they are not able to check up for themselves on whether they have met their targets. A team of talented and experienced teaching assistants support pupils' learning very well and their support is particularly effective when they are working with individual pupils or with small groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Educational visits bring pupils' learning to life and are an integral part of teachers' planning. There is a good enrichment programme, which includes many planned visits out of school, varied arts and sports activities as well as several lunchtime clubs and special events. For example, older pupils loved a recently highly successful project called 'Letting in the Light', in which they explored activities they enjoy and their wildest dreams through discussion, drama, writing and drawing. Stunning large silk panels depicting their ideas were produced and displayed with pride. The school's effective links with other local schools, medical practitioners and agencies also enrich pupils' learning and well-being. Visitors into school are used well to promote different aspects of pupils' development and learning. The visit of a police officer helped pupils to understand how to keep safe. Since 2006, when the school's population began to cover a wider variety of specific learning needs, senior leaders have reviewed and revised how the school plans what pupils will learn. For instance, they have established a 'Kingfisher' group to meet the specialist needs of lower ability pupils with PMLD who have additional sensory needs. However there is still work to do to ensure that all staff consistently adapt the curriculum sensitively and imaginatively enough to meet the needs of the wide variety of learners with severe and complex needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school succeeds in making sure that all pupils are well cared for, kept safe and supported effectively. Health, safety, and child protection procedures are rigorous and effectively applied in supporting all pupils. Arrangements for managing pupils' intimate care needs are performed sensitively. There are good arrangements for assessing how well pupils are doing in their academic learning. Staff regularly discuss pupils' progress with senior leaders, and decide what needs to be done next. A great deal of valuable assessment information is gathered. However,

not all pupils are clear about what they are to learn in lessons, and older and more able pupils are not involved enough in evaluating their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The determination and unstinting pursuit of the pupils' best interests shown by the headteacher and deputy headteacher ensure that the dedicated staff work as a cohesive team with a clear sense of direction. The school's self-evaluation is good and is well supported by regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' achievement and personal development. Senior leaders have identified that teachers' expertise and curriculum planning require further improvement to consistently meet the needs of pupils with ASD and BESD. They are already taking some steps to improve this. The school promotes school and local community cohesion well and is correctly looking to extend its boundaries and develop international links via a joint project with a nearby primary school. Good improvement has been made in many areas since the school's last inspection, and senior leaders and staff demonstrate a strong commitment and capacity to improve even 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

24 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marshlands Primary School (Special), Stafford, ST17 4RD

We enjoyed visiting your school. You were friendly and many of you smiled at us, which made us feel welcome. We liked talking to the school council and seeing the photographs of your play about Indiana Jones and the Sleeping Beauty, and looking at your brilliant artwork.

- Here are some of the things we found out about your school.
- You enjoy being at school and like your teachers and your friends.
- Your behaviour is good and you are usually kind to each other.
- Your curriculum and teaching are good and help you learn well.
- All the staff take good care of you and keep you safe and happy.
- We think that you must have a really good time and enjoy all the clubs, visits, visitors and playing outside.
- Everyone works very hard to make sure you have a good school. There are three things that we want the staff and governors to do to make your school even better.
- Make sure that teachers plan activities which you all enjoy and can take part in.
- Help all of you learn as much as you can in lessons and help those who are able to know and use their learning targets.
- Make sure all of the staff tell your mums and dads what you have been learning at school so they can help you to learn at home as well as at school.

You can help your teachers by always working hard, taking good care of each other and by always being good.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Joyce Cox Lead inspector