

Pathways Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	128190
Local Authority	Redcar and Cleveland
Inspection number	328516
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Eric Craven HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Valerie Halton
Headteacher	Mr Rob Arrowsmith
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
School address	Tennyson Avenue Grangetown TS6 7NP
Telephone number	01642 779292
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Age group	7–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and each pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The large majority of pupils are from areas that experience significant social and economic disadvantage: 70% are entitled to free school meals, which is well above the national average. Almost all pupils are boys and are White British. Three are looked after by the local authority. The school was placed in special measures in March 2007 and has received five monitoring inspections up until March 2009. In June 2008, following the departure of the previous headteacher and deputy headteacher, the school formed a federation with the local authority's Education Other Than At School Service (EOTAS) and the headteacher of EOTAS became the executive headteacher of both the school and the service and two senior staff from EOTAS became the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher of the school. The executive headteacher is soon to retire and the local authority has arranged for an experienced retired headteacher to take on the role on a temporary basis from September 2009. The school is facing a large deficit budget and a consequent staffing restructure for September 2009 has led to redundancy notices being issued to a number of teaching assistants and teachers. Year 11 pupils were not in school at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Nevertheless, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

From a low base at its last inspection, and notably since the arrival of the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher a year ago, the school has taken positive strides forward in a number of areas. As a consequence of satisfactory and improving teaching along with a more interesting and suitable curriculum the majority of pupils make sound progress. This is a better picture than found at the last inspection when pupils' achievement and standards were judged to be inadequate. The ethos at the school has improved and most staff are in tune with the vision articulated by the acting headteacher and the ways of managing pupils' behaviour that have been agreed in the revised behaviour policy. Overall, pupils' behaviour has improved but, coinciding with a lowering of staff morale because of the redundancy situation, pupils' behaviour has recently worsened. The acting headteacher recognises that the school's positive handling policy needs to be refreshed along with training for staff and this is planned for early next term. The school has worked well with the local authority and established a revised system for collecting and analysing attendance data. It now has a more accurate view of attendance which has improved. However, there is a group of 13 challenging pupils, known as the Rhino group, who are on the roll of the school but educated either full-time or part-time off-site at alternative education and vocational providers. Their education is managed by the EOTAS service. When their attendance is included, the overall attendance figure is too low. Unhelpfully their behaviour and achievements are not included in the school's tracking data. The arrangement to have these pupils managed by the EOTAS service was inherited by the acting headteacher and was unknown to the local authority at the time of the last inspection. The acting headteacher has recently begun to liaise with the local authority to ensure that responsibility for these pupils is more properly exercised by the school. The local authority reports that it has begun to assess these pupils' needs and feels that some require more specialist provision. Poor behaviour and low attendance mean that the pupils' personal development and well-being overall are inadequate. These are strong indicators that a significant minority of pupils do not enjoy their education. On a more positive note, other aspects of their personal development are satisfactory. For example, pupils make a sound contribution to the school and the local community.

Care, guidance and support for the pupils have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory, although some administrative tasks associated with welfare arrangements need to improve. Although improved, the quality of teaching and learning is still uneven with the quality of lessons ranging widely from inadequate to occasionally outstanding. Not enough is consistently good or better so that faster strides can be taken in eroding the legacy of underachievement for many pupils. The curriculum has improved in breadth and interest to the pupils: it now meets statutory requirements except for the teaching of a modern foreign language at Key Stage 3. The refurbished science room has added greatly to the opportunities for pupils to study this subject and the addition of photography to the curriculum has given pupils an interest and a course of study in which they are proving they can succeed.

Together the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have tackled the school's weaknesses with drive, determination and enthusiasm, setting out clear expectations and aspirations for the future. With the support of the local authority they have not shied away from tackling a difficult budget situation. Increasingly, senior staff are monitoring and evaluating aspects of the school's provision and pupils' outcomes and the formation of staff teams to be party to this work is giving staff a helpful insight into improvements required. The areas for improvement from the previous inspection have all been tackled although there remains more to do to further improve behaviour and attendance and to ensure the curriculum meets statutory requirements. The capacity of the senior leaders to make further progress is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance by achieving the target agreed with the local authority for 2010.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that most of it is consistently good.
- Take more responsibility for the education of the pupils educated through the EOTAS service by monitoring and reviewing their provision and progress.
- Ensure a modern foreign language is taught at Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When they arrive at the school most pupils' attainment is below that expected of pupils of a similar age nationally. Standards are on the rise and the predictions for the Year 11 results in 2009 are substantially better than the results achieved in 2008. The school's records show that predictions for the Year 11 pupils' results are that around three-quarters should achieve at or above the targets they have been set. Standards have risen in English following the appointment of a specialist English teacher a year ago. A few pupils have been predicted to achieve GCSE grade C in science, art, information and communication technology (ICT) and photography. An expanded range of qualifications available to the pupils has made a good contribution to this improvement. Seventeen Level 1 and above qualifications are available now compared to five in 2008. The school's tracking system shows that current pupils make most progress in the primary class and least progress in Years 8 and 10.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Pupils who attend regularly are given suitable opportunities to make a contribution to the school. Most often this is through fundraising events. The pupils receive at least the required two hours of physical activity a week and they are taught about healthy living and keeping safe. However, there are too many who have not applied this learning to good effect for these to be judged good; overall these areas are satisfactory. The pupils have an improved sense of what is right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable although too many still display volatile behaviour in classes and around the school. Nevertheless, from a poor position, behaviour has improved since the last inspection. Fixed-term exclusions, numbers of serious incidents and physical aggression toward staff have all reduced. However, this is without consideration of the behaviour and attitudes of the Rhino group of pupils whose data on behaviour has not been included by the school in its measures of improvement. Pupils are adequately prepared for life after school through improving work-related learning experiences and, where appropriate, personalised learning packages as well as by their improving achievements. Those that attend

most regularly do recognise that the school is improving and value and enjoy the improved range of activities available to them. However, low attendance and poor behaviour are indicators that too many pupils do not enjoy school. Pupils' spiritual development is weak because too little time is devoted to it. The school has made a very promising start in measuring pupils' progress in a wide range of aspects of their personal development and well-being but it is too early to see the impact of this work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Teachers have become more consistent in their planning and some have begun to use assessment effectively to plan work to match the needs of groups and individuals. However this is not yet a consistent practice. The work of a staff group for teaching and learning, led by a senior member of staff, has improved quality assurance arrangements and feedback to teachers and subsequent training has begun to move teaching forward. Teachers are readily accepting guidance and advice and indeed some are seeking this out as they strive to improve their practice. The quality of teaching is strongest in English, art, science and ICT where good consideration is given to making work particular to individual pupils. Activities are well thought out so they provide a good stimulus to pupils' interest. For example, the single pupil in an English lesson was captured by the theme of a haunted house and how to use descriptive language to describe the effect on his five senses. In the weakest lessons behaviour management is not used to good effect to prevent pupils disrupting the flow of the lessons and work is not set carefully to challenge pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which has improved since the previous inspection. It broadly meet meets statutory requirements. The school recognises that further work is needed to improve religious education (RE) and spiritual and cultural elements of the curriculum. A modern foreign language is taught in the primary class but not in Key Stage 3. The provision for music has improved and all pupils have access to music lessons which they enjoy.

At Key Stage 4, pupils can now follow a wider range of courses both within the school and through alternative provision off site. Pupils have enjoyed the recent introduction of a GCSE photography course and have shown their work in a number of exhibitions. Many of the photographs adorn the walls and contribute well to the pleasing displays around the school.

Pupils are able to choose from a range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities at break and lunch times and these are linked to the reward system. Pupils collect points for work, behaviour and attendance and can access activities of their choice. This is very popular with the pupils who commented on the good range of activities available including football, pool, electronic games and DJ decks. There is extra support for pupils who experience difficulties with their reading and, helpfully, the school has put in place a reading programme so that all pupils can improve their literacy skills. However this programme does not match the interests and ages of all the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support for its pupils. Child protection procedures are in place and arrangements for safeguarding and health and safety are satisfactory. Staff have an understanding of pupils' pastoral needs and each pupil has a mentor. Pupils value the mentor system: they say they know who to go to if they have a problem and that staff usually sort out problems quickly. Links with parents, carers and external agencies generally work well.

The academic guidance given to pupils has improved and is satisfactory. Teachers inform pupils about their progress through assessment of their work and through marking. The quality of this is inconsistent across the school but is a notable strength in English and art. The Connexions service has increased its time in school for pupils to discuss courses and gain advice on careers. The great majority of pupils leaving school this year have gained college places. The service has made plans to work with those in Years 9 and 10 in the near future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has been traumatised by the recent announcement of redundancies but, nevertheless, morale and staff cohesiveness have improved over the last year. Pupils and most staff say the school is a more positive place to be. There was a very limited response from parents to the questionnaire about the inspection with only two returns which presented mixed views of the school. However, the school's records of parental consultations show that generally parents feel that relationships are stronger, communication has improved and their children are achieving more. The school works effectively with other agencies and partners, not least through its federation with the EOTAS service, which has been very supportive. The school development plan is a solid response to the school's areas for improvement. These have been identified accurately as priorities because the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear view of strengths and weaknesses. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, particularly teaching and learning, are becoming more systematic and effective. The governing body has improved its effectiveness in operating as a critical friend to the school. An increased membership, which includes parental representation, training and links with departments in the school, has put governors in a good position to know about the school's work and to be able to hold it to account.

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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?	4
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

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?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	4
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pathways Special School, Redcar and Cleveland, TS6 7NP

Thank you for your warm welcome when Mrs Colquhoun and I inspected your school recently. Thank you in particular to the members of the school council.

As you know your school has been in special measures since its last inspection and has received visits from inspectors to check on its progress. This was a full inspection. I am pleased to tell you that we judged the school no longer requires special measures. However, because there is still more to do to improve further, in particular to do with your attendance and behaviour, we have judged that the school requires a notice to improve. This means that another inspector will visit the school to see how it is improving and another inspection will take place in a year or so.

We could see that the school had made improvements to teaching and the curriculum so that you are learning more. It was nice to hear that staff expect the Year 11 pupils' exam results this year to be much better than last year. Photography and the new science room have added a lot to the school and the teaching of English is much improved. Nevertheless we would like the quality of all teaching and learning to be better still and this is something that the staff want too. We could see that staff care for you and were delighted when those of you we spoke to told us you felt there was always someone you could turn to if you had a problem. We know that since the last inspection attendance and behaviour have improved but we feel these need to get better still. You can play your part by attending every day and behaving as well as you can. If you don't attend and concentrate you won't put yourselves in the best position to get a job or move on to college when you leave school.

We have also asked staff to make sure that a foreign language is taught in Key Stage 3 just as it is in the primary class. In addition, more checks are needed on how well those pupils in the Rhino group are being educated.

You each have my good wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven

Her Majesty's Inspector