

Longcause Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113650
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	338213
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Joy Davenport
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Livingstone (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They visited 13 lessons and held discussions with governors, staff, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including pupils' books and displays of their work, curricular documents, the school's improvement plan and 44 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the quality of teaching across the school and how well assessment information is used in planning lessons to ensure they meet the particular special educational needs and/or disabilities of all pupils
- the impact of specialist school status and the organisation of the curriculum on raising standards
- the quality of care, guidance and support for pupils and the effectiveness of support for parents and carers
- the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its work.

Information about the school

Longcause Community Special School provides education for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Approximately two thirds of the pupils have an autistic spectrum disorder, a significant increase since the time of the last inspection. Most of the remainder have moderate learning difficulties, and a small number have severe or complex needs associated with speech, language and communication difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and the majority are boys. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and their home language is English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than the national average. Pupils are drawn from a wide catchment area within the city of Plymouth and west Devon. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of one mixed-age Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 class. An outreach, advice, support and information service (OASIS) is based at the school, and is run jointly by the school and local authority. As part of this service, the school manages a parent support adviser and training facilities. The school was granted specialist status for sports with a secondary subject of art in September 2008. The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2009 to lead the school for one term until a newly appointed substantive headteacher joins the school in January 2010.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Longcause Community Special School provides a satisfactory quality of education. It is a caring school where pupils feel happy and safe. The high standard of care and a broad curriculum underpin pupils' enjoyment of school and their good personal development. In the words of one parent, 'My son's confidence and self-esteem have really developed since his time at Longcause.' The school's specialist status has been used effectively to provide a wide range of physical and sporting activities and to foster strong links with the community.

Satisfactory teaching ensures all groups of pupils make satisfactory progress, regardless of their different starting points. Lessons are characterised by clear routines and good relationships which create a positive climate for learning. Pictures and symbols are often used to good effect in several classes to help pupils with communication difficulties to understand the timetable. The small number of pupils with the most complex needs have carefully adapted programmes, sometimes supported by the use of objects of reference. The school has a good system for assessing and recording pupils' progress, although in some classes this information is not always used effectively to inform teachers' planning and to set precise targets for pupils' improvement. This limits some pupils' ability to build on their existing skills and knowledge and to make the progress of which these pupils are capable. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start to their education, although there are insufficient tactile and sensory resources available in the outdoor learning area, and this limits their physical and creative development.

As they move up the school pupils become increasingly independent and self-confident. They make a good contribution to the school community and develop valuable skills for future life and employment, for example through participating in the school council or learning to become an independent traveller. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle, which is promoted well by the wide range of physical exercise and sporting activities.

Parents hold extremely positive views about the school and appreciate how the school works closely with them as partners. As one commented, 'I have found the school very open and supportive in all aspects of my child's education.' This aspect of the school's work is strengthened by the high quality of the parent support service.

The school has been successful in promoting community cohesion at a local level and has forged strong international links with other schools. Links with wider British communities to provide pupils with knowledge of different cultural, religious and ethnic groups are less well developed.

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The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory, although the monitoring of teaching does not focus sufficiently on key aspects, such as the use of assessment. The school demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve. Since the last inspection it has improved the curriculum, for example by establishing a new information and communication technology suite and gaining specialist school status. The pace of change has been slower in adapting teaching to meet the needs of the increased number of pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder. The governing body is very supportive of the school, although its ability to monitor and challenge the school's performance is underdeveloped. In part, this is due to the lack of detail it receives in reports from senior leaders.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide children in the Early Years Foundation Stage with more tactile and sensory resources in the outdoor learning area.
- Improve teaching and learning by using assessment information more consistently to set targets and to match activities closely to pupils' individual levels of ability. Implement this by the end of the autumn term 2009.
- Strengthen the contribution made to community cohesion by:
 - evaluating current links with the community to ensure they take account of different religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups
 - ensuring pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the different cultural and religious traditions in modern Britain.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - extending the governing body's knowledge of how to monitor and challenge the school's performance, particularly through the provision of more detailed information from senior leaders
 - sharpening the monitoring of teaching and learning so that best practice is shared by all staff.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils' personal development is good and whilst the quality of learning observed was generally good in primary classes, it was satisfactory overall. Lessons include interesting activities which capture pupils' interest, for example when pupils discuss a volcano and draw and describe an eruption. Pupils demonstrate confidence in using the interactive whiteboard to present their ideas to the rest of the group. Teachers generally explain the purpose of lessons clearly and often involve pupils in reviewing learning at the end of the session. However, particularly in secondary classes, teachers' planning too often focuses on the activity to be completed rather than on what pupils are expected to learn. As a result, a few more capable pupils are not always given sufficient challenge and lower attaining pupils struggle to keep up. Pupils with different special educational needs and/or disabilities, and both boys and girls, make similar progress.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, as demonstrated by their high rate of attendance. They

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are polite and behave well both in lessons and around the school. Pupils particularly enjoy the exciting opportunities provided by the curriculum, such as sailing, attending a residential trip, or visiting France. They also feel proud of how they develop their independence and contribute to the life of the school, for example by recycling waste paper, taking messages, or helping the school site manager. Pupils' self-esteem is promoted and achievement recognised effectively through giving out stickers in classes for younger pupils and awarding certificates in assemblies for older pupils. Whilst pupils benefit from links with the local church and can recall the welcome given to visitors from a school in South Africa, their knowledge of the diverse religions and cultures in modern Britain is less well developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Staff generally have a good knowledge of the needs of pupils with an autistic spectrum

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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disorder. Many classes use effectively a recognised approach which emphasises a clear structure to the school day supported by pictorial timetables and symbols. As a result, pupils feel secure and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. Staff form positive relationships with pupils and give appropriate praise and encouragement, which helps pupils to try hard and to complete their work. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and lessons generally move at a brisk pace. There is inconsistency between classes in the presentation and marking of work and pupils are not always given sufficient guidance on how they might improve their work. The school has a suitable system for recording pupils' progress, which is regularly updated. However, there is inconsistency between classes in the use of assessment information to plan lessons. In some classes, a careful record is kept of each pupil's progress and targets identified for improvement. In a few classes, targets are not sufficiently precise to make clear the next steps in pupils' learning. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to supporting individual pupils and in running small groups. Some are highly trained in the education of pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder and are very successful in managing pupils' anxiety and maximising their learning. In a few lessons the effect of their support is limited because the next steps in pupils' learning are not sufficiently clear.

The curriculum has been enhanced by the school's specialist sports college status and includes extensive opportunities for physical activity, for example daily 'brain gym' warm-up sessions, weekly physical education lessons, sailing, after-school sports clubs and a residential trip to an outdoor pursuits centre. Secondary pupils enjoy the broad range of after-school clubs which enrich the curriculum. The curriculum is extended by visiting professionals who provide, for example, dance, drama, music therapy and speech and language therapy. The school benefits from well-equipped rooms for teaching food technology, art, drama and information and communication technology. The use of classrooms has been reorganised recently in response to an increase in the number of pupils on roll. Currently there is limited provision for teaching some aspects of design and technology and physical education due to building issues. The personal, social and health education curriculum covers a suitable range of topics and the school nurse is involved in teaching the sex and relationships programme. However, the policy for this is out of date and the school is currently reviewing it. Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network courses and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme effectively support older students' independence and social development. Students in Year 11 attend the local college of further education to complete vocational courses.

The high standard of care is underpinned by the close partnership with parents and the trusting relationships between pupils and staff. As one parent commented, 'Pupils are always relaxed and happy and have an excellent relationship with staff.' Pupils also report they feel happy and safe and as one said 'we don't bully in this school'. Thorough arrangements are in place to ensure pupils settle well when they join the school. Procedures for following up attendance are rigorous. Older pupils receive comprehensive careers advice and support to plan appropriate destinations for when they leave.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and staff share a strong commitment to the welfare of pupils which underpins the school's caring ethos. A close and valued partnership has been established with parents. This includes the school running workshops to give parents the opportunity to share experiences and to discuss helpful strategies for use with children who have an autistic spectrum disorder. The ambition of leadership is satisfactory. Strong leadership is demonstrated by development of the specialist school status which has been particularly effective in extending the sports curriculum. The school is currently focusing on developing the arts as a next step. Suitable plans are in place to take the school forward, although in some areas the drive for improvement has been slow because the review of longer-term priorities has been deferred until after the new headteacher is in post.

The school has introduced an effective system for checking pupils' academic progress and for analysing the performance of different groups. Information is used to set learning targets, although the impact of targets on raising standards is limited due to the lack of focus in the systems for monitoring teaching and learning. The school is successful in promoting the participation of all groups in the many activities on offer. However, it has not yet given consideration to the particular needs of the minority of girls.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are satisfactory. Risk assessments of pupils' individual needs and a policy for managing anxious behaviour are in place. The child protection policy, whilst satisfactory, does not take full account of pupils' specific special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has been successful in promoting community links at a local level and forged links with global communities. For example, it has received the International School Award in recognition of its links with a school in South Africa. However, current links have not yet been evaluated to ensure they take full account of the different religious, ethnic, and socio-economic groups in wider Britain. The governing body has a satisfactory understanding of the school's work and systems are in place to ensure the school runs smoothly and finances are managed prudently. Its ability to monitor and challenge the school's performance is underdeveloped.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Staff know the needs of each child well and provide a high level of care. Assessment information is used very effectively to set targets and to plan activities which are closely matched to each child's level of ability. As a result, children settle well and make good progress, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Staff have a very good knowledge of the needs of children with an autistic spectrum disorder and use symbols and pictures very well to help children understand their learning. Leadership and management are good. Very good communication with parents and other professionals ensures the individual needs of children are met fully. The school recognises that the outdoor learning area requires additional resources and has appropriate plans to improve it.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents hold extremely positive views about the school and appreciate how children

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enjoy attending. Additional comments included an appreciation of the support families receive; the caring and safe environment; the effective arrangements for communication; and, the improved self confidence of their child.

Several parents thought the level of teaching and learning was higher than that found by inspectors. The few negative views reflected in the questionnaire entries were not corroborated by inspection evidence.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Longcause Community Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 99 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	33	144	58	18	7	5	0
The school keeps my child safe	67	27	155	63	17	7	4	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	50	20	145	59	29	12	5	8
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	23	146	59	21	9	3	8
The teaching is good at this school	56	23	148	60	18	7	4	9
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	18	143	58	35	14	4	9
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	9	159	64	37	15	11	8
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	44	18	148	60	27	11	2	11
The school meets my child's particular needs	44	18	160	65	20	8	4	8
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	55	22	124	50	36	15	12	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	9	150	61	27	11	8	16
The school is led and managed effectively	53	21	164	66	16	7	2	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	77	31	137	55	19	8	7	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Longcause Community Special School, Plymouth PL7 1JB

Recently I visited your school with two other inspectors. We enjoyed our visit very much and thought it was a happy and friendly school. Thanks to those of you who took time to talk to us about your work and life at school.

Here are the main points.

- Your school provides a satisfactory standard of education.
- You enjoy coming to school because of the interesting activities on offer, particularly the visits, residential trips and sporting activities.
- The school helps you to develop a good understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle.
- Your behaviour is good and you play an active part in the life of the school.
- You become more independent and confident young people during your time at the school.
- The school works closely with your parents, who are very pleased with the education you receive.
- Your headteacher and other adults make sure you receive a good level of care and that those of you who struggle with your learning receive extra help.

I have asked the school to do a few things to make it better.

- Provide more equipment in the outdoor learning area for those of you in the Reception class.
- Make sure that teachers in all classes match work closely to your level of ability so you can make faster progress.
- Help you to learn more about the different religions and cultures in Britain.
- Make sure that adults who have responsibility for running the school find out more about how well you are getting on in lessons.

You can help by always trying your best, telling the teacher if work is either too easy or too hard, and by taking an interest in how people live in different parts of Britain.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Redpath

Her Majesty's Inspector

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