

Heart of the Forest Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134190
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	341438
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Stephen McShane 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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Henchley
Headteacher	Melissa Bradshaw
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors visited 13 lessons involving 10 teachers and held meetings with pupils, governors, staff and the school improvement partner. They looked at approximately five hours of learning in classrooms, pupils' achievement files, progress data and school policies and records. Fifty one questionnaires from parents and carers were returned and examined. Staff and pupil questionnaires were also analysed.

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

- the learning and progress of different groups of pupils
- the impact of management, self-evaluation and school improvement initiatives since the last inspection
- the school's own evidence for outstanding provision and outcomes.

Information about the school

Heart of the Forest school admits pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). A number of the pupils have additional needs related to autistic spectrum disorder or challenging behaviour. The school has a few older pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD). A number of pupils are looked after by their local authority. The vast majority of pupils at the school are from a White British heritage.

Due to rising numbers the school is currently building new accommodation. Due for completion in 2011, this will give additional classroom space, particularly for the Early Years Foundation Stage and for the further education department (sixth form) of the school.

The new headteacher took up post in January 2010 following a term when the school was led by the deputy headteacher. The school has gained the Healthy Schools award, Artsmark and the International School award.

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

Heart of the Forest is a satisfactory school. It has many good features. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. They develop outstanding outcomes in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the extent to which they feel safe and develop healthy lifestyles.

The key strength of the school lies in the welcoming and harmonious atmosphere. Pupils are looked after well by a caring team of adults who are committed to helping each pupil overcome their individual barriers to learning. The youngest children are doing particularly well in the newly established Early Years Foundation Stage provision.

Overall, teaching in the school is satisfactory but it varies across the school. Inspectors saw lessons that ranged from outstanding to inadequate. While there are many procedures for assessing pupils, assessment information is used inconsistently to plan lessons that challenge all pupils. Activities are interesting and well prepared but opportunities are missed to develop pupils' independence, their use of language and literacy and their thinking and problem-solving skills.

The school lacks convincing evidence for a great deal of its self-evaluation, due to the lack of systematic monitoring of the impact of teaching and of school improvement initiatives on pupils' learning. Inspectors disagreed with the school's overly positive view of itself in many areas. However, the senior management team is not complacent and has been working hard on appropriate school improvement priorities. It now has suitable data to evaluate progress more accurately, has established a successful Early Years Foundation Stage provision and has strongly influenced the design of the new buildings. Although the headteacher is new to the school, she has been quick to build upon the energy, commitment and professionalism of her senior management team and refined the school's priorities so that there is satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' learning and progress by:
 - making better use of assessment information to plan lessons and set learning outcomes for all pupils across all subjects
 - ensuring that all pupils make good progress in lessons by setting tasks and employing resources appropriate to each individual's ability
 - ensuring the curriculum in the classroom offers opportunities to develop independence, basic and key skills.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation at all levels so that:

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- teachers are able to monitor the learning that is taking place and their pupils' progression towards challenging targets
- inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning across the school are tackled and by January 2011, 90% of teaching is leading to good or better learning and progress
- middle and senior leaders have a clear grasp of the impact of different initiatives on pupils' learning and lines of accountability are clearly demonstrated and are related to the progress of pupils
- governors have the necessary information to hold the school to account for the outcomes of all pupils.

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

The school's own data and lesson observations show that all groups of pupils make satisfactory progress when measured against their starting points. The majority are making the expected progress in acquiring literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Many pupils leave the school with a range of accreditation and qualifications; including GCSE Art and entry level and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards.

Pupils enjoy school. Behaviour is good. The vast majority of pupils are ready to learn and are willing to cooperate with requests, even when routines are considerably disrupted, as they were before the inspection due to the snow. Pupils make appropriate choices and take turns. Some pupils have more challenging behaviour but, through appropriate interventions, this is managed well and there is evidence of improvement. Some more able pupils, however, do not take sufficient responsibility for themselves and for their own behaviour.

Attendance is broadly average. It is affected by some flexible placements due to parental requests and/or health reasons. Pupils are adequately prepared for their next steps in education or training. They develop satisfactory enterprise skills through opportunities to make and sell produce, but are held back by the lack of opportunities to practise and develop key and basic skills.

Pupils appear to feel very safe in the school. Observations of those with the most significant need show that when they need close personal attention, are upset or anxious, they take comfort from the adults around them. Some pupils expressed the view that they trust the adults. Older pupils have been involved in innovative film making in which they tackle health-related and personal safety issues. This and their discussions in class help to promote a strong knowledge of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. Pupils take part enthusiastically in a number of sporting activities and some experience readily a wide range of sensory and therapeutic activities that encourage a greater awareness of self and their own body.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the wider community through participation in the school council, as class mentors to younger classes, in representing

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the school at different events and through fundraising for different charities.

Pupils demonstrate very strong social awareness in their everyday interactions. In an assembly, they spontaneously celebrated and applauded one pupil's particular performance. They are caring and supportive of each other and tolerant of behaviour that can appear challenging or difficult to understand. Pupils appreciate different spiritual and cultural events and respond to them very well.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

In all lessons observed there was evidence of planning, interesting activities and suitable classroom management that meant that resources were prepared and adults were deployed to help different groups of pupils. However, the impact of these on pupils' learning and progress varied considerably. In the best lessons, work was closely matched to the needs of the individual and there was close assessment of progress

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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throughout the lesson to ensure that the level of challenge was appropriate. For example, in a lesson following a recent trip, pupils were challenged to recall their experiences and use signing and symbols to develop their answers further. Good practice was observed where opportunities were taken to develop independence and build on prior knowledge; for example, in applying mathematical skills in a cookery lesson. In too many lessons, however, the activities were not precisely matched to individual need or the need of groups of pupils and therefore the level of challenge was variable and the pace was too slow. There was too much 'teacher talk' and too much adult prompting and involvement. In these lessons, pupils became very passive learners or became restless and bored. Feedback was limited to praising pupils about their behaviour or their listening.

The curriculum includes many interesting activities such as opportunities to develop animation and take part in spectacular whole-school performances, sporting activities, visits and residential trips. The school has made appropriate provision for pupils who may need a more sensory curriculum and pupils can be observed enjoying the close contact that Sherbourne movement (placing trust in others through shared experiences) allows or the excitement of the sensory room. Signing and symbols enhance communication although their use is variable through the school. While the school has a clear plan in place to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. However, it is insufficiently monitored to ensure that pupils are experiencing the most appropriate activities to help them to develop their skills further and enhance their progress.

The school cares for its pupils well. Staff are very responsive to pupils' personal needs. There were many examples where sensitive handling by an adult helped to comfort a pupil who was confused or distressed. The school works with other agencies very effectively to ensure that therapeutic needs are met and support staff carry out programmes that are appropriately designed by a range of professionals. The school has recently developed music and art therapy projects to better meet the emotional needs of some of its young people. On some occasions, although well meaning, too much support was given. This actually impeded the development of independence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The management team is strongly committed to supporting each individual child and and their families. It has been successful in developing a number of projects since the

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last inspection and is now fully engaged in auditing the provision and setting new priorities for the future with the governors. This has already resulted in clear priorities being set for community cohesion and an accurate evaluation of safeguarding. Governors know aspects of the school well and have detailed knowledge, for example, of health and safety and finance. However, they have not sufficiently held the school to account for the outcomes and progress of pupils. They have relied too much on their own personal perceptions that their school is outstanding. The school supports individual parents and carers very well and keeps close contact with them. The school's partnership with a local charity, one of several good partnerships, also enhances the support for parents and carers and the care the school can offer to its pupils.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Through the school's recent detailed audit of its provision it has a clear idea of its strengths and areas for development. Policies, procedures and records are appropriate. The school responds quickly and effectively to any child protection concerns. It works very effectively with other agencies to ensure that pupils who are looked after by the local authority are well supported. All pupils are respected and no group is discriminated against. Community cohesion is evident in the school's good local links with other schools and the community. This was clearly evident during the inspection with an assembly on wassailing to 'awake Gloucestershire's cider apple trees'. There are good international links with schools in Uganda and developing links with other schools nationally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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Although the provision has only been opened for approximately two terms it is already a strength of the school. The vast majority of children attend part time and are in one class although the school's provision is flexible enough to cater for the needs of one child in an older class. It is clear, from the examination of the detailed records and observations, that all children are making good progress, in particular, developing early skills of concentration and interaction. The children are comfortable and relaxed in the safe and stimulating environment. Adults are extremely aware of the children's responses and use these proactively to offer some element of child- initiated learning. There are very good links with parents and carers. The teacher in charge is knowledgeable and manages the provision very effectively, particularly through her detailed and thorough planning and weekly child-centred team meetings.

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

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is similar to the rest of the school. An interesting curriculum is offered to the students who complete different modules of the ASDAN award scheme. Relationships are good. Staff are caring. Students are comfortable and happy. Lessons are planned and conducted in a positive atmosphere. However, the level of challenge is variable in lessons and this means that, overall, students are making satisfactory progress. Opportunities are missed to use students' prior learning and challenge them further. On occasions, there is too much staff direction or staff support and this means that opportunities to develop further life skills and independence are missed.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

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Almost every parent and carer who replied to the questionnaire was happy with their child's experience at the school. The additional comments particularly highlighted the very caring and supportive staff. The few negative comments received related to issues addressed in the report or were explored with the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Heart of the Forest 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 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 78 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	71	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	39	76	12	24	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	65	18	35	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	61	20	39	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	35	69	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	53	22	43	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	55	23	45	0	0	0	0
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)	31	61	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	73	11	22	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	59	17	33	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	61	18	35	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	69	15	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	76	12	24	0	0	0	0

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 pupils' 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.



25 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heart of the Forest Community Special School, Coleford, GL16 7EJ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school and for talking to us. We enjoyed your assembly about wassailing to make the apples grow, seeing some of you make pasta and scones, and seeing you learning in your classrooms and in the sensory room.

We found out that:

- heart of the Forest is a satisfactory school
- you are making satisfactory progress overall and some of the younger children are making good progress
- you are cared for very well by all the adults
- you know a lot about keeping safe and being healthy
- you are very kind to each other.

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and teachers:

- to make sure the work is always just right for you so that you are always challenged
- to let you practise your speaking and listening skills and independence in lessons
- to keep checking whether you are learning enough.

It was a privilege to meet you all. Keep up your good behaviour.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane

Her Majesty's Inspector

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