

Amwell View School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117684
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290893
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	109
6th form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Farrington
Headteacher	Mrs Jan Liversage
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2002
School address	St Margaret's Stanstead Abbots Nr Ware Hertfordshire SG12 8EH
Telephone number	01920 870027
Fax number	01920 871664

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, some of whom have additional sensory or physical impairment, autistic spectrum disorders and other specific conditions. The school has gained the Investors in People award, the Active Mark Gold award and is working towards Sports College status, with science as a second specialist subject. In recent months, the school has been adversely affected by staff absence through sickness, including the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which has sustained and built on the many strengths identified at the last inspection. Parents are highly appreciative of its work and say that 'the dedication and expertise of the staff are wonderful'. Parents particularly value the way all pupils are included, the extent to which they are kept informed about their children's progress and the 'unique and hugely varied experiences' the school provides.

All the staff give a great deal of care, encouragement and support to pupils. Each pupil is treated as an individual and relationships between pupils and staff are excellent. As a result, pupils make excellent progress in their personal development. They are happy, confident and gain a great deal of enjoyment from all that the school has to offer.

Although standards are very low as a result of pupils' learning difficulties, achievement is outstanding throughout the school, including in the Foundation Stage. Teaching is outstanding. It is nearly always at least good and a significant amount is excellent. There is much exemplary practice; for instance, in the teaching of pupils with multi-sensory impairment and in physical education (PE). At times, teachers do not always match work to the needs of different pupils and a few lessons lack pace. The outstanding curriculum is the school's greatest strength. It is varied, motivating and challenging. Extensive links with other schools, with businesses and the local community and a wealth of enrichment activities help to make learning exciting for pupils of all ages.

The school's effectiveness is the result of outstanding leadership and management. Staff expertise is used to very good effect and excellent accommodation and resources contribute significantly to pupils' achievement and personal development. The headteacher and other members of the senior team are dynamic leaders who seek continuously to improve the school. It has an outstanding capacity to improve further and provides exceptionally good value for money. Managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and gather a wealth of evidence from monitoring and assessment. However, they do not analyse this as closely as they could in evaluating the school's effectiveness.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision for students at post-16 is outstanding. They make excellent progress in response to good teaching, an exceptionally rich curriculum and outstanding leadership. Opportunities to gain accreditation are matched very closely to the needs of individual students. They meet with a high level of success in either the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Youth Award Scheme (at bronze or silver) or ASDAN Towards Independence, and in AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) awards in English, mathematics and home management skills. Outstanding links with colleges and local businesses provide students with a wealth of opportunities to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding and do much to develop their independence and prepare them for life after school. They are exceptionally well cared for and supported and make outstanding progress in their personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the way monitoring information and data are used to evaluate the school's effectiveness, and share the outstanding practice already in the school to improve teaching that is currently good.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement is outstanding. In the Foundation Stage, children gain a wide range of skills that underpin their future learning. Throughout the school, pupils make exceptional progress in personal, social and health education and meet a high proportion of the targets in their individual education plans. Pupils with multi-sensory impairment make excellent progress when they work with specialist teachers in the sensory room. Pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are making distinct progress in reading as a result of a very well focused support programme, which is soon to be used also with younger pupils. Progress is outstanding in music as a result of very high quality teaching and the many opportunities pupils have to perform in and beyond the school. Pupils make tremendous progress and reach their highest standards in PE, where the school has a long history of success in the Special Olympics, with pupils taking part in athletics, bowling, cycling, gymnastics, skiing and swimming. They also compete in dance festivals and develop their competency as senior sports leaders. In PE, they gain a wide range of personal as well as physical skills through the opportunities provided within Amwell View and through links with other establishments. Pupils make good progress in other areas in Key Stages 1 to 4. At post-16, students gain a number of accredited qualifications as well as gaining a range of additional skills at college and in their work experience placements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They show great enjoyment in response to music and physical activities in lessons and this helps to keep them motivated in their learning. They carry out the many responsibilities they are given with pride; for example, representing the school in community sports activities. Parents say that they love coming to school and attendance is good. Pupils behave in a thoughtful, well-mannered and mature way. They work exceptionally hard and, as a consequence, their self-esteem is raised by their achievements, which are actively celebrated by the school. The healthy schools initiative has helped to raise their understanding of the importance of physical exercise and eating healthily and they learn about keeping safe in their personal, social and health education lessons. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for the future. Older pupils make products such as stencilled wrapping-paper and hold board meetings for their team enterprise, and they put their decision-making and discussion skills into practice in their work experience.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Senior staff have worked very effectively in supporting a number of new staff in order to improve their teaching. Throughout the school, teachers prepare their lessons very thoroughly and are skilled in using interactive whiteboards to make learning stimulating. Teaching assistants are used very well and resources such as pictures, objects and a range of materials that appeal to pupils' senses are used to very good effect to bring learning to life. Where necessary, signing and switches are also used well to support pupils' communication. Teachers identify precise learning objectives for each lesson but, where teaching is good rather than outstanding, too much attention is given to producing highly detailed lesson plans rather than how to match tasks to the needs of different pupils. Where teaching is outstanding, the match of work to the next steps in each pupil's learning is precise and the pace is lively. In the teaching of pupils with multi-sensory impairment, an exceptional level of sensitivity to pupils' feelings and needs is evident.

The school collects a vast amount of assessment information on every pupil. It identifies very carefully the needs of each pupil on entry to the school and uses its ongoing records of pupils' attainment to set precise learning targets in each subject as well as identifying personal targets in pupils' individual education plans.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Learning opportunities are matched precisely to pupils' age and stage of development and provide a great deal of variety. They include many practical and multi-sensory experiences and investigative play. The use of music and PE to support learning across the curriculum is highly creative and very effective. Pupils' personal development is extended directly through personal, social and health education and indirectly through the whole curriculum. The school's extensive range of partnerships with other establishments and organisations further extends curriculum experiences. Furthermore, the wide range of activities provided in lunch-time and after-school clubs, such as drama, swimming, football, storytelling, dance, choir and science, contribute significantly to pupils' achievement. The opportunities for accreditation are excellent and provide highly motivating and relevant experiences for pupils of all abilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support. The consistent and sensitive management of pupils who find it difficult to concentrate is exemplary. Teaching assistants are a much valued part of class teams and their outstanding contribution is central to meeting individual pupils' needs. The school works in very close collaboration with a range of therapists in meeting pupils' academic and personal needs. It has thorough procedures for protecting

pupils and keeping them safe. Risks are carefully assessed and suitable action is taken to minimise them. Pupils receive a good level of feedback about how well they are doing and detailed information is kept to track their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher and other senior leaders provide outstanding direction to the school's work. Although no key issues for development were identified in the last inspection, the school has continued to build on the many strengths found at that time. Teamwork amongst staff is strong, very good opportunities are provided for teachers and teaching assistants to extend their skills through training and all the staff are committed to making the school as good as possible. The extensive links that have been established with schools and colleges are of great benefit to the pupils, and the outreach support that is provided by Amwell View staff to mainstream schools is very carefully planned and well received.

Improvement is planned in detail, taking into account pupils' and parents' views, and a vast amount of data and monitoring information is collected. Applying for specialist school status has encouraged managers to use monitoring information more analytically in judging the school's effectiveness. They have also begun to make greater use of data in comparing pupils' achievement from one subject to another and have put this to good effect to raise standards in reading. However, the process of analysing and synthesising the wealth of information the school collects as part of its self-evaluation is not as rigorous as it could be. Under the leadership of a very experienced chair of governors, the governing body makes a good contribution to the school's effectiveness. Governors are closely involved in the life of the school and bring valuable expertise to their role. Information gleaned from their own visits to the school is supplemented by detailed reports from the headteacher and subject coordinators.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Amwell View School, Stanstead Abbots, SG12 8EH

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our visit and now I am writing to tell you what we found out about the school.

This is an outstanding school and we could see why so many of your parents are pleased with how much it helps you. All the teachers and other adults care about every one of you and look after you really well. We were pleased to see how happy you are at school and we could see that you get a lot of enjoyment from all the interesting things there are to do. You are making really good progress in your work and you do especially well in music and physical education. This is because the school provides you with some fantastic experiences and the teaching is nearly always at least good and often outstanding. The school is particularly good at using its links with other schools, with colleges and with a lot of other people who help to make learning exciting for you.

Your school is so good because it is led really well by Mrs Liversage and the other managers, and they are always trying to make the school better for you. We have asked them to think even more carefully about what is working best and what could be improved. And as there is already quite a lot of outstanding teaching, they will be able to use that to make the good lessons even better for you.

We are pleased that you have such a good school to go to and hope that you keep on trying hard and enjoying all the lovely activities.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Goodchild

Lead Inspector