

# The Walnuts School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110584
<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	378121
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 June 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	James Bowden

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.  
The inspection of social care was carried out under the care Standards Act 2000.

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	144
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	23
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jane Stubbs
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nick Jackman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13–14 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Admiral Drive Hazeley Milton Keynes MK8 0PU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 563885
<b>Fax number</b>	01908 555617
<b>Email address</b>	admin@walnuts.milton-keynes.sch.uk

---

<b>Age group</b>	4–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	27–28 June 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	378121



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
 Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
 E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
 W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2012



## Introduction

Inspection team

James Bowden

Additional inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The residential children's home provision was inspected concurrently by two social care inspectors. Eleven lessons were observed, taught by 11 different teachers. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, the school leadership and senior management teams, others with posts of responsibility and with a small group of students. The inspectors took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at students' files, curriculum plans, students' progress information, records of rates of attendance and students' work, including displays in and around the classrooms. Questionnaire responses from 31 parents and carers, 48 staff and 54 students were analysed.

## Information about the school

This is an above average-sized residential special school for students who have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and a range of social, communication and interaction difficulties. In addition to their primary need, most have associated learning difficulties ranging from moderate to severe. Numbers have risen since the previous inspection with increasingly more severe, complex and challenging behaviour needs. All students have a statement of special educational needs. As a result of the increase in numbers, the school is now based on two sites, some three miles apart. The annexe in Bletchley provides for children in Reception to Year 3. Sixth form students are taught as part of whole-school provision at the main building. The oldest sixth form group travel daily, with adult support, to a local base in the community.

Boys outnumber girls by almost five to one. The large majority of students are of White British and other White backgrounds. A small minority are of Black African and Asian or Asian British background. A few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has gained a number of awards, including National Autistic Society Autism accreditation. It is also a specialist school for communication and interaction.

The headteacher also has responsibility for the residential provision. A copy of the report for this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because teaching, although good overall, lacks consistency in challenging fully the needs and capabilities of all students in the main school and assessment procedures do not always ensure targets are realistic, especially for those students with more complex needs and challenging behaviour. In addition, the curriculum does not provide structured individual learning programmes for students aged 14 to 19.
- The quality of learning is good. It is particularly so in the Early Years Foundation Stage. By the time they leave school, all students have made good strides in developing their communication skills, as well as in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Good quality teaching is underpinned by the effective close collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants. All adults know their students well and provide calm and measured support. They use a wide range of communication strategies to engage students.
- Students are keen to learn and their behaviour, although sometimes challenging because of their needs, does not unduly disrupt others' learning because staff are highly skilled in behaviour management. The school is a safe place in which to learn.
- Leadership and management of the school are good. Self-evaluation has improved well since the previous inspection and there is a greater involvement of leaders at all levels in evaluating the school's work. Effective monitoring by senior leaders has resulted in improvement in the quality of teaching. Good self-evaluation and tracking enable senior leaders to keep a careful watch on progress and improve the performance of both students and teachers.
- Although there is no designated sixth form provision, there being small numbers involved, older students make good progress, particularly in developing

**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

independent living skills.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' achievements further by:
  - ensuring that teaching consistently provides sufficient challenge for all students in each class
  - sharpening assessment procedures to ensure realistic targets are set for the growing number of students with complex needs
  - adding breadth to the curriculum for older students to enable them to follow individual learning programmes suited to their needs.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Low attainment on entry to the school is as a result of children's ASD needs and increasingly complex needs, including challenging behaviour and, for some, severe speech, language and communication needs. Careful assessment of children's capabilities on entry enables the school to plan the range of support and learning best suited to them, as does ongoing assessment over time as they move through the school. Those in the Early Years Foundation Stage make particularly good progress in preparation for learning through improvement in their communication skills. This results in good achievement, as shown by whole-school data linked to national progression guidance for disabled students and those with special educational needs. This is particularly so in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, as well as in speech, language and communication competencies. As a result of the school's assessment that students who speak English as an additional language were lagging behind their peers, additional support was put in place ensuring that there are no significant differences in the progress of different groups of students. Sixth form students gain accreditation in aspects of personal development, including preparation for independent living, and some follow functional skills courses.

In lessons observed during the inspection, students made good progress overall. In a senior class, students successfully tackled the task of taking the role of Macbeth and wrote a letter to his wife expressing his thoughts about, for example, the three witches. A few were able to read aloud and follow the text being read to them. Assessment and data tracking procedures are effective in supporting students' learning. However, recent target setting has focused solely on setting higher level targets for all rather than setting them individually to enable students to make progress commensurate with their capabilities. Of the small minority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority were positive in their views of the progress being made by their children, a view supported by inspection evidence.

**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

## Quality of teaching

A significant strength of teaching is the consistent way in which staff manage students' behaviour and how well they know their autism needs. A flexible but calm approach enables these needs to be met. In a junior class 'choosing' session, the teaching assistant was highly effective in quietly pointing out to a pupil that he, the teaching assistant, was not to be used as a 'climbing frame'. In a senior class, two of the teaching assistants used massage particularly well to help two students stay on focus and complete the task at hand. Underpinning successful teaching is the detailed planning that focuses not only on expected learning outcomes, but also on the use of adult support and ASD-specific provision. In an infant class of mainly non-verbal children, the teacher used children's photographs to highlight the individual instructions and teaching assistants modelled play activities in order to ensure they knew what to do. Teachers are also adept at questioning students, using visual communication cards where appropriate, to gauge students' progress in learning. In some lessons, particularly for the higher level speaking students, good use is made of opportunities to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In a sixth form art lesson, students commented upon the exaggerated figurative sculptures of Ron Mueck being shown on a DVD. Information and communication technology is used effectively across the school to support teaching and enliven learning. Teachers plan lessons effectively, clearly identifying what is to be taught and what is expected of the students.

On occasion, although students are kept on task throughout the lesson, the work is not always sufficiently challenging to those relatively more able in classes. In a senior class, students were given the option of either presenting their worksheet as a drawing or a piece of writing. As a result, all but one chose the former even though there were some who were capable of writing out their worksheet, which would have improved their literacy skills even further. On other occasions, some staff do not always allow students sufficient time to respond to questions, either using visual communication cards or verbally. Of the small minority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority are happy with the quality of teaching, as are most students; a view endorsed by inspection evidence.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

Typical behaviour is good. All students have a behaviour management plan and policies and individual cases are reviewed regularly. Additional risk assessments are made when appropriate and positive handling plans are introduced. This is particularly the case for the greater number of students with more complex needs and challenging behaviour patterns. Incidents of harassment, including those based on race, gender or sexuality, are few. In discussion with an inspector, senior students said there was no bullying and felt it would be dealt with by the school if it did happen. One added, 'Sometimes people fall out.' Students in this group were also fully aware of issues surrounding internet safety.

Although a very small minority of parents and carers and students had reservations

**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

about standards of behaviour, they were far more positive about how well the school deals with this. This was confirmed during the inspection where staff managed behaviour very well. There were no instances of students' learning in lessons being unduly disrupted by untoward behaviour of their peers. Where students were unsettled, they were escorted calmly to the quiet room adjoining each classroom so as to allow others to continue their learning. This was particularly effective with a senior student who was becoming frustrated as a result of changes in his residential routines earlier in the morning. When he had calmed down, under the support and guidance of his teaching assistant, he returned to the lesson and continued with the task at hand. Most parents, carers and students felt the school was a safe place to be.

Overall, attendance is above that expected for special schools and pupil referral units, and has been so for three years. Unauthorised attendance is minimal. The school makes effective use of outside specialist help where there is any persistent absenteeism.

### **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management of the school have been reorganised since the previous inspection. The senior management team, including the headteacher, prioritises whole-school strategic decisions and the newly formed school leadership team (including both senior and middle leaders) concentrates on the school's operational matters. Consequently, more staff are actively involved in decision making at all levels and feel supported by enhanced professional development opportunities. These changes have addressed the leadership and management issues identified at the previous inspection. In addition, the roles, responsibilities and involvement of the governing body have also improved, including starting a programme of formal visits to monitor and evaluate the work of the school in order to improve its focus on being a critical yet supportive friend.

Accurate self-evaluation has effectively informed the school's priority development plans in, for example, teaching and learning. As a result of the improved monitoring and evaluation, the proportion of teaching judged to be good has increased considerably with far less satisfactory; lesson observations by inspectors confirmed this to be the case. The school's tracking of students' progress shows a greater proportion now make good progress in lessons and over time. However, since the previous inspection, the school has had to cope with increasing numbers and the demands on its accommodation, which have resulted in a split site. In addition, there are increasing numbers of students with more complex needs and challenging behaviour. Governors and senior managers have plans in place to ensure staff are prepared fully for this emerging pattern of change in intake.

The curriculum effectively supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In one lesson seen students were focusing on the Olympic ideals of friendship, courage, excellence and respect and some were providing examples from their own lives. In addition, throughout the week of the inspection the forthcoming

**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

London Olympics was the week's theme, culminating on Thursday afternoon in the school's class teams' Olympic games where students experienced competitive individual and teamwork activities. However, senior leaders are aware that the curriculum for older students lacks sufficient opportunities to enable them to follow individual learning programmes best suited to their particular needs. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and any discrimination tackled immediately. Essential procedures are in place to ensure robust safeguarding arrangements, such as for safe recruitment practices and risk assessments for the off-site provision, including school trips. Of the small minority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, the large majority are positive about their children's experiences at the school.



## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



2 July 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of The Walnuts School, Milton Keynes MK8 0PU**

Not so long ago, two of us visited the school to see how you were getting on. We also wanted see whether we could suggest anything to make the school even better for you. We thoroughly enjoyed our time at the school, meeting a small group of you as well as talking with individuals. I was particularly pleased to see how you were enjoying taking part in the school's own Olympic Games afternoon! Most of you who responded to the inspection questionnaire were full of praise for the teachers and how well you were taught. We agree with you and found the school provides you with a good quality education.

Here are some of the other good things we found.

- All staff at the school have your best interests at heart and look after you well.
- The staff know how difficult learning can be for some of you and use lots of ways to make learning interesting.
- All staff help you improve your independence and prepare you well for when you eventually leave the school.
- The good curriculum provides lots of interesting things to do.
- The headteacher and his staff have appropriate plans to improve the school and are working hard to make things even better for you.

We have asked those in charge of the school to make two main improvements:

- make sure that all of you are given challenging work in lessons with targets you can achieve
- provide a greater range of and extra courses for the older students.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden  
Lead inspector

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).**