



The Walnuts School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110584
LEA Milton Keynes LEA
Inspection number 278458
Inspection dates 15 December 2005 to 16 December 2005
Reporting inspector Melvyn Blackband AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Simpson
School category	Maintained		Milton Keynes
Age range of pupils	4 to 14		MK6 3AF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01908 670032
Number on roll	78	Fax number	01908 232774
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Jane Stubbs
Date of previous inspection	29 November 1999	Headteacher	Mr Nick Jackman

Age group 4 to 14	Inspection dates 15 December 2005 - 16 December 2005	Inspection number 278458
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Walnuts is a special school for pupils aged 4-14 with autistic spectrum disorders and severe social communication difficulties. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are currently 78 pupils at the school. There is also provision for up to 17 boarders. Due to a recent increase in numbers the school is full and some older pupils are taught off site in buildings belonging to a neighbouring school. The local authority has firm plans to build a completely new school which will open in January 2007. The pupils are mainly white British with a small number of pupils from other ethnic groups. The number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below the national average. There is currently one pupil in public care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Walnuts has accurately evaluated itself as a good school. The pupils enjoy being there and make outstanding progress in their personal development. Parents are happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe, free from bullying and intimidation and are making good progress. Because of their learning difficulties the standards reached by pupils are below national averages but all pupils do well in their studies. Pupils' achievement could be outstanding when the school has refined its assessment and record keeping procedures. The achievement of pupils in the Foundation Stage is excellent. Pupils throughout the school are well taught by committed and knowledgeable staff. There is an interesting and wide ranging curriculum. The classroom accommodation however, remains unsatisfactory for older pupils. There is a good range of extra activities. These involve pupils in the wider community and encourage their independence and confidence in unfamiliar surroundings. Pupils are very well supported and cared for and are involved in decisions about their progress. The boarding provision is outstanding. The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides clear leadership and he is well supported by a competent senior team. The school is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and has made good progress since the previous inspection. The school is well thought of in the local community, for instance in the effective outreach service whereby staff advise other schools. There is a good capacity to improve further. The school's finances are well managed and the school's daily routines are efficient. The school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Boarding provision is outstanding. The accommodation is well maintained and modernised. The provision is very well managed and inspections by the Commission for Social care confirm that facilities and care are substantially above the national minimum standards. Pupils are safe while encouraged to take as much responsibility as they can manage. Many opportunities are built into routines to encourage the pupils to work and socialise in small groups and thus help them to overcome their difficulties in communication. Pupils are taken out into the community regularly and make a positive contribution to local groups. The relationships between care staff and teachers are excellent, for instance in the use of verbal and written records and in the consistency of appropriate methods to support the behaviour and communication of the pupils. Staff know the pupils very well and they continually add to their experience of autism through well directed training.

What the school should do to improve further

* Improve the standard of accommodation, especially for older pupils* Make better use of existing systems to more clearly identify the small steps in pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school has comprehensive strategies for measuring the progress which pupils make. Senior staff collect appropriate data on each child's performance and this forms the basis for detailed evaluation and monitoring of teaching strategies and the curriculum. The results show that the pupils, many of whom enter the school with low levels of attainment, make outstanding progress through the Foundation Stage and continue to achieve well throughout the rest of their time in the school. A small proportion of pupils achieve well enough to successfully reintegrate into mainstream schools. Pupils meet most of their IEP targets and careful monitoring by the school has ensured that there is no underachievement by any group or individual. There are strong procedures for measuring the pupils' achievement in language and communication. These play a significant part in promoting the good progress which pupils make in this area.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are exceptionally well behaved. This reflects the school's very careful management of each individual child's behaviour and the emphasis on moral and social values. The school is very calm and pupils work and socialise happily because they are made aware of what is expected of them, often reinforced by visual clues. There is very good provision to ensure pupils spiritual understanding through a range of sensory experiences. Their moral and social understanding is enhanced by all the staff, who effectively model behaviour and encourage the pupils in circle time to work and befriend others and to understand the impact of their own actions. The pupils' develop knowledge of different cultures through effectively targeted visits into the community and through the celebration of differences in school. The pupils feel safe and report no bullying or intimidation. Teachers provide very good programmes for personal, health and social education which are taught throughout the curriculum and which help the pupils to make sense of their relationships with other people. There are good programmes to teach pupils about sex and relationships and the school ensures pupils eat healthily and take part in physical activities. Pupils have many opportunities to make their views known, such as in the school council, and so contribute to the well being of the school. The good progress the pupils make in literacy and numeracy helps to prepare them for adult life. Attendance is very good and closely monitored. Parents feel very positive about their children's progress and made many comments about how their child had become happy and confident to try new things since joining the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and have maintained the improvement noted in the previous report. Teaching is very good in the Foundation Stage. Teachers know their pupils well and adapt work for each individual. The teachers are able to ensure that learning targets for pupils are realistic and challenging although the school has not developed an efficient system to ensure all staff consistently identify and record each small step in the pupils' learning. The staff form exceptionally good teams, working well together, sharing knowledge about pupils in their joint planning and sharing responsibilities in the classroom. For instance, pupils in a Year 4 literacy lesson, when being taught together, were helped to ask and answer questions, confident in the support of the adults. Teachers and support staff have been very well trained in aspects of teaching pupils with autism. They confidently and appropriately use visual communication aids to support individual pupils. The pupils like and trust the adults in their class and they respond by working hard and doing their best. The pupils work with high levels of concentration and teachers ensure they enjoy their lessons and achieve success, free from the frustrations and anxieties which their disability often brings. The staff have adapted well to the cramped accommodation and have ensured that pupils are not adversely affected.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy purposeful and interesting activities, adapted in Years 2 to 6 from the National Curriculum into topic based programmes which are well constructed to help pupils to use their learning in a variety of situations. The curriculum is very well monitored to ensure it meets pupils' needs. Provision for teaching literacy and numeracy is very good because the school has made good use of national strategies to introduce rigour in planning for these subjects. The Foundation Stage curriculum is very good and underpinned by clear assessment of pupils' achievements. Teachers still experience the cramped conditions noted in the previous report but they have adapted the curriculum imaginatively and they compensate effectively. There has been significant improvement in provision for physical education, music and in information and communications technology (ICT) although resources in this subject need updating. Because of pressures on space older pupils share facilities in another school. Provision for teaching science and design technology on this site are inadequate and this restricts the opportunities for pupils in these subjects. The curriculum throughout the school has been appropriately adapted to take account of the pupils communication needs and the school is well served by the speech and language service. There is an extensive range of extra activities which take pupils out of the classroom and which are targeted to specific aspects of the curriculum. These visits to the community encourage the pupils' understanding of different social situations and teach them that new things can be learned in all sorts of situations. The curriculum places an appropriate emphasis

on the pupils' personal skills and they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own safety and for a healthy lifestyle. Careers education is in the early stages of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is safe for pupils. Health and safety is rigorously monitored. Child protection procedures are very well managed and regularly reviewed and staff training is appropriately updated. The school cares very well for pupils' welfare both in the school and the boarding provision and this makes a significant contribution to their enjoyment and achievement. The pupils receive very good support and they are fully involved in discussing their progress towards their personal development targets. They are helped to understand how well they are doing in lessons through the high standard of individual support they receive in the classroom. There are very good procedures for preparing pupils for the next stage in their education and these help to maintain the pupils' enjoyment and self confidence as they move through the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

There is a strong management team. The headteacher shows good leadership through his commitment to developing the skills of staff and his determination to maintain high standards of teaching and care. He is supported by competent senior staff. The Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. The governing body is gaining a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses through efficient committees and regular monitoring visits. Staff relationships are good. Teachers and support staff work effectively in teams and feel valued and supported. The quality of induction and professional development and training is very good and has had a significant impact on the school's continuing success as the number of pupils has grown and many new staff appointed. Good use is made of assessment data to plan improvement in curriculum subjects and to track attainment. Managers have established very efficient formal and informal systems to help them monitor, evaluate and improve on each aspect of the school's performance. The school development plan is clear and understood by all and provides a good basis for continued improvement. Most parents feel well informed about their child's progress. The school has demonstrated its capacity to improve since the previous inspection and remains in a good condition to maintain this improvement.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Not long ago I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether there was anything I could suggest that would make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you. Thank you and well done!

I was with you for two days. That was long enough for me to realise that you get a good education. You make good progress in learning to do things for yourselves. I particularly enjoyed visiting you in the classrooms and seeing the good work you were doing. There were lots of other things that I liked. Here are a few: * You obviously enjoy coming to school * The many different people working at the unit look after you very well * You are able to be as independent as possible * You are learning to communicate with others in many different ways. This will help you as you grow up.

Things I felt would make the unit better are: * Some of the classrooms are too small and older pupils cannot do as much science and design technology as they should * Teachers should agree on the best way to help you make progress in every lesson.