

Old Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104274
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	308559
Inspection date	27 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Megee

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	3-14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Exton
Headteacher	Nigel Smith
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Bentley Lane Walsall WS2 7LU
Telephone number	01902 368045
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Age group	3-14
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Old Hall School provides education for pupils who live in the western and central parts of Walsall. The local authority is reorganising its school provision from September 2008, and Old Hall School will no longer be providing education for Key Stage 3 pupils. This will mean a reduction in the number of pupils attending the school as well as a smaller staff. Pupils have severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties, while some in addition have more complex difficulties such as autism or profound medical needs. The headteacher has been in post for 18 months.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Old Hall School provides a good education, and brings about good academic achievement and outstanding personal development. Parents and pupils take great pride in the school. As one parent said, 'We are so lucky to have a school like Old Hall School.' Children make a spectacularly good start in the Foundation Stage, where there is outstanding provision and consequently terrific progress. At the heart of the school's success are strong and effective leadership, good teaching and an outstanding curriculum.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the future, underpinned by good planning, skilful management and accurate self-evaluation. The school's good capacity for further improvement is demonstrated clearly by the way it has successfully raised attendance over the last two years and achieved national awards for improving health and fitness, and its excellence in providing for youngsters in the Foundation Stage. The headteacher has guided the school well during this period of change. He is well supported by the new leadership team, who are already working effectively to ensure that the transition results in continuing improvements.

All through the school, pupils receive an exciting and vibrant curriculum. This, linked with good teaching, means that pupils achieve well in all years even though standards are exceptionally low because of the nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils love coming to school because classrooms are fun places to be, and there is plenty to do beyond the classrooms as well. The school recently won a cup for its prowess in sailing, and during the inspection, tired but happy pupils returned from the regular residential visit to an outdoor centre. Teachers and pupils relate very well to each other and provide pupils with constant encouragement. While most pupils make good progress in developing their ability to communicate, staff do not make consistent use of signs and symbols to make their meaning clear. This holds back achievement, especially for those who rely heavily on these alternative methods of communication.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding because pastoral care is of a high standard. Staff give the pupils a great deal of support for their personal needs and, as a consequence, pupils feel very well cared for and safe. Pupils behave excellently at all times in this secure environment and, when given responsibility, they take their duties very seriously. The school ensures that there is high quality specialist provision for those pupils who have additional needs such as those with autism. Staff from different agencies link together well to provide a very good service, particularly to those pupils who have complex medical needs. However, even the most able pupils do not have a clear understanding of their individual targets or how to reach them quickly because teachers do not refer to them enough when planning lessons or in their teaching.

One parent summed up the essence of the school when she commented, 'Brilliant staff, brilliant school. I would recommend it to anyone.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding in every aspect and, as a consequence, children make outstanding progress in both their academic and personal development. The staff ensure that children settle into school quickly and happily through home visits and a gradual introduction into school life. Straight away, close relationships are established between home

and school. Teaching staff, parents and carers value this highly and this aspect is at the heart of the success of the provision. Staff carefully structure lessons, emphasising activities that are fun, relevant and motivating for each child. Staff support children's learning very well, both through planned play and through extending and developing spontaneous play. The staff are highly skilled, know the children well and provide activities precisely matched to their individual needs. Staff plan lessons meticulously, and assess achievement regularly and accurately. Pupils further up the school frequently refer to their wonderful experiences when they first came to the school. One pupil said, 'I've been here 12 years, and I still love those nice people from early years when I was three, and I couldn't talk a lot.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Make consistent and effective use of signs and symbols to support pupils' communication.
- Emphasise pupils' individual key targets in lessons and make sure pupils know what they need to do in order to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good throughout the whole school and pupils make a terrific start to their education in the Foundation Stage, where achievement is outstanding because of the excellent teaching and care in that department. Apart from this, there is no difference between the achievement of the various other groups in the school such as boys and girls, or those with different learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Achievement is particularly strong in subjects such as mathematics, religious education and information and communication technology because there is good specialist teaching in these areas. Pupils achieve well in developing communication skills, although not all teachers make effective use of signs and symbols to help pupils understand and make their meaning clear. Achievement against individual targets is held back to a certain extent, because pupils' targets are not sufficiently emphasised in all lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is illustrated by their very positive social relationships, which are a prominent feature of the school. Pupils are enthusiastic and conscientious in their attitudes to work and each other. They love their school, as can be seen from their good attendance, exemplary behaviour and very positive responses in lessons. As one parent said, 'My son adores coming to school, especially all the things they do outdoors.' Pupils clearly understand how to stay healthy, and they tell you how many pieces of fruit they should eat each day, and how many they have actually eaten. Pupils, even those who are vulnerable or liable to be anxious, feel very safe because of the vigilance and care of all the staff. The pupils show a clear awareness of the importance of personal safety and behave safely and with consideration and kindness. Pupils say that there is no fighting or bullying. The school does all it can to minimise absence. As a result, attendance is improving and is good, taking into account the serious medical needs of many of the pupils. Pupils attend many joint activities with local mainstream schools, although only a few pupils have the opportunity to attend mainstream classes. Pupils take very seriously any opportunities they have to take responsibility in school, such as being on the school council. As one student said, 'I think the school council should meet again soon, because I have to remind the headteacher about the goalposts he

promised us five weeks ago.' The pupils are well prepared for their future by achieving good basic skills and through the very good transition programmes when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and classroom staff work very well together and provide good role models to the pupils. They give constant encouragement and feedback to the pupils, who as a result, feel confident to respond and express themselves. As one parent said, 'Teachers and staff do a brilliant job at encouraging the children, and it shows in my child's progress.' Teachers make good use of assessment to plan interesting, individualised activities that match the different needs within the class. Staff do not always supplement what they say by effectively using signs and symbols in order to make their meaning clear. This inhibits some pupils' understanding of what is going on in the lesson and slows their progress as a result. Teachers have good subject knowledge, although the reorganisation of the school means that many teachers are taking on new subject responsibilities. The school is providing good training to help them develop their expertise in these new areas. Staff working with pupils with complex medical needs or autism have expert specialist skills which they use very well to help these pupils feel comfortable, secure and ready to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum provides a first class range of activities throughout the school day. Classrooms and specialist areas are exciting and well resourced environments that motivate and inspire pupils. The school provides an imaginative array of daily activities, visitors, visits and challenges that bring learning to life and very effectively enhance learners' personal development. Pupils' work is celebrated through high quality displays in classrooms and around the school. The school is organised in such a way that pupils always receive the right range of activities and teaching strategies. For example, there are classes for pupils who require more emphasis on sensory elements to assist their learning. In these classes, the pupils may receive massage to relax them and get them ready to learn. The classrooms are equipped with specialised lighting and music systems, which the pupils learn to control and which activate their senses and stimulate awareness. Other pupils require and receive an environment which distracts them as little as possible. Here, there are individual workstations to allow pupils to feel less anxious so that they work hard and quickly gain independence. The school provides many opportunities that enrich pupils' lives further. These include residential opportunities, horse-riding, sailing and lunchtime activities such as the signing choir.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides high quality personal care and support to pupils of all ages and abilities. Procedures to safeguard learners are thorough and robust. There is very good teamwork between the different agencies who work in the school. Pupils with medical needs receive the close specialist attention of health professionals, and parents speak very well of these arrangements. As one said, 'Our son has very poor health. The nurse has been very helpful, and he's made many small, positive steps forward.' Parents say that the staff make every effort to keep them

informed through the home-school diary, and through making themselves available if they are needed. A typical comment is, 'As a family we have a fantastic relationship with the school. This is a big bonus.' Action taken to improve attendance is effective. Academic guidance is not quite so strong as personal guidance. Pupils do not always have a very clear understanding of their individual targets, and so do not know exactly what steps to take next in order to improve. This is because staff do not always spell out what is required. This holds achievement back.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has not been long in post but has brought about good improvements to the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. This has led to successful interventions to improve teaching and learning. The headteacher enjoys the confidence of parents, who say, for example, 'The headteacher is always to hand and very helpful.' The headteacher has done well in reducing the number of staff while maintaining good morale. At the same time, he has brought about a strong culture of self-improvement among staff, who are relishing the new roles and opportunities being made available following the reorganisation this summer. The headteacher has good, valuable support from his senior colleagues, while leadership is being distributed more widely through the new extended leadership team. Their effective working has put the school in a strong position for further improvement. The school's key management processes such as development planning and performance management are effective, although the school does not yet sufficiently measure the impact which new initiatives are having upon pupils' achievement. The governors provide effective support and suitable challenge to keep expectations rising.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

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

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

30 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Old Hall School, Walsall WS2 7LU

Thank you very much for helping me when I came to the school recently. A special thanks to the school council members who gave up their time to tell me how good your school is.

This is what I found out about your school.

- Your school is as good as you told me it is.
- You make good progress in learning.
- You are growing up very well indeed.
- Your teachers know what they are doing and teach you well.
- The school offers you a fantastic range of things to do.
- The headteacher runs the school well.

In order to get even better, I have asked the school to do the following two things.

- The teachers and other staff should all make better use of signs and symbols.
- The teachers should make sure that you know your targets and, wherever possible, help you to reach them.

Perhaps you could play your part by using signs yourselves as well as speaking, to remind adults if they forget. Can you also thank your mums and dads for filling in the questionnaires and for coming to talk to us?

By the way, the headteacher says he is still working on the goalposts and will meet you soon to talk about it.

Very best wishes for the future

Mick Megee Lead inspector