

Herons Dale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126169
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	340935
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nic Day
Headteacher	Mrs Trish Stepney
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including 15 parents' questionnaires, 7 pupils' questionnaires and 12 staff questionnaires.

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

- Achievement and progress of all pupils from their starting points, particularly pupils with additional needs such as autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The quality of the assessment of the small steps in learning which pupils make and how effectively teachers use this information to adapt work for individual pupils.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school. Whether the senior leadership team have accurately identified strengths and weaknesses and whether there are appropriate measures to improve standards where necessary.
- The effectiveness of leaders at all levels (governing body, senior and middle managers) at monitoring, analysing and evaluating the school's performance.

Information about the school

Herons Dale is a community special school which provides for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. A majority of pupils have additional learning difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorders or profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are four times as many boys as girls. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Herons Dale is a good school. Teachers ensure that all the learners, no matter what their disability, are able to benefit equally from the school's provision. Standards remain far below those expected in mainstream schools because of the pupils' learning difficulties. However, all the pupils do well in their studies and a small minority make outstanding progress. Those pupils with additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorder or profound and multiple learning difficulties achieve equally well. Younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start in developing language and communication skills through the well-planned use of symbols and signing. The school has maintained good improvement in its performance since the last inspection.

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers carefully plan the learning to meet individual pupils' needs well including high-quality support from the teaching assistants. As a result, the pupils enjoy their learning and respond well by trying to do their best. The tracking of pupils' progress is accurate and detailed. This enables the school's leaders to identify strengths in teaching and intervene quickly when they detect slowdown in the pupils' performance. The school is good at assessing the small steps in learning which pupils make. Currently, this information is not used well enough to write learning targets that are sufficiently precise and measurable. As a result, some pupils do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of how to improve their work and this can slow down the pace of their learning.

The curriculum is good because teachers tailor activities effectively to students' needs and interests. As a result, the pupils tackle challenging tasks with enthusiasm. The school is particularly good at ensuring that those pupils with additional difficulties have full access to the curriculum by adapting the learning opportunities to their differing learning styles and abilities. There is also a good range of extra activities which add much to the pupils' enjoyment of school and enhance their social skills and understanding of community cohesion.

Pupils thrive within the caring ethos of the school. They all make good progress in their personal development. Pupils feel safe and secure and are confident that adults will listen carefully to their views. This underpins their positive attitudes to learning and helps them to make good progress. Pupils behave well, feel well supported and become confident and happy learners. Their positive relationships with staff and each other and the good attendance of all but a very few pupils are further evidence of their enjoyment of school.

The headteacher's commitment and enthusiasm coupled with her clear vision for

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development has enabled her to make significant improvements to the school's performance. She is ably supported by a competent leadership team. Governors are supportive of the school. Most members of the governing body are, however, relatively new and inexperienced. They are at an early stage of developing appropriate structures to support and challenge the school's leaders and to call the school to account. The senior leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness well. They involve effectively all members of the school's community in this process. Because of the school's rigorous and accurate self-evaluation, and the good track record of improvements since the previous inspection, there is a good capacity to sustain the improvement further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the use of assessment information to set realistic and measurable short-term learning targets to help pupils develop a clearer understanding of how to improve their work.
- Develop the skills and confidence of governors to provide suitable challenge and support by:
 - ensuring they have a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development
 - establishing effective procedures to monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school's performance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils achieve well because good teaching gives them the confidence and motivation to become enthusiastic learners. Pupils listen attentively and concentrate as hard as they can because they find learning is exciting and fun. They respond well to questions using aids such as symbols or switches confidently.

The standards attained by pupils remain low because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, they make good progress in their communication skills and in their grasp of basic literacy and numeracy. Pupils with additional multiple needs make equally good progress because activities are well adapted for them. For example, some pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were able to respond independently to the story of 'Peter and the Wolf' by using their switches, which were clearly marked with symbols and pictures. Pupils with autism achieve well in overcoming the barriers to their understanding and communication. As a result, they make good and sometimes outstanding progress. There is no evidence of underachievement by any individual or group.

The pupils display positive attitudes to learning and behave well because they feel safe within the school's calm and friendly atmosphere. Over time, they develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and thoroughly enjoy the opportunities for physical activity. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also good and underpins the good relationships that are evident across the school. Pupils respect and value each

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other and are tolerant of each others' difficulties. They make a good contribution to the school and the local community through, for example, the activities of the school council. The attendance of most pupils is good because they really enjoy learning. Pupils are emphatic that they are free from bullying or unpleasantness and really look forward to coming to school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching standards are good throughout the school and this has a substantial impact on the pupils' good achievement. Teachers know their pupils very well and plan interesting, well-paced activities which motivate them to do their very best. The teachers and the teaching assistants assess and record accurately the pupils' progress. This information is used well to plan the next stages of learning. High levels of well-targeted support enable pupils to gain the confidence to try new things and so learn faster. Pupils behave well

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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and understand and respond to clear routines. The very occasional incidents of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with well by adults.

Pupils enjoy a well-constructed curriculum which is appropriately adapted to their needs and is carefully monitored to measure the impact on their individual achievements. This ensures that all pupils have equal access to the learning. Teachers use information and communication technology well to make learning easier and fun. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are able to communicate using whiteboards, pre-programmed switches and vocal aids. Those with autistic spectrum disorder are able to access the learning through the very well-planned use of visual clues and timetables.

Programmes in personal, health and social education underpin much of the school's work and these have a significant impact on the pupils' achievement in personal skills, their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety.

The school provides a good standard of care for all of its pupils. Pupils are very well supported by school staff and a variety of outside professionals in each stage of their learning. However, pupils do not always understand how to improve their academic and personal skills because their learning targets are not focused clearly enough on their individual needs. Parents receive accurate and comprehensive progress reports at review meetings and feel fully involved in their children's education. Pupils receive very good support as they are about to leave the school. This helps them to manage effectively the challenges they face as they make the transition to secondary school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The school leaders continue to embed ambition and drive forward improvements. Staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued. They work together as a committed and cohesive team to ensure consistency of practice in most areas of the school's work. As a result, the school is extremely good at tackling discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. Self-evaluation involves staff at all levels and provides an accurate diagnosis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring and analysis of pupil achievement and the teaching and learning are rigorous and incisive. The quality of the staff training makes a significant contribution to sustaining pupils' good achievement. Governors are at the early stages of developing rigorous procedures to monitor the school's strengths and areas for development so they can challenge and support the

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school effectively.

Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are exceptionally good and the school ensures that pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Leaders are good at ensuring the school is a cohesive community and that pupils develop their clearer understanding of diversity in the local and wider communities.

Partnerships with other schools are enthusiastically pursued and are enriching the provision for Herons Dale children. For example, pupils take part in a growing number of shared activities with children from a mainstream primary school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children achieve well because they receive good teaching and their learning is well led and managed. Pupils enter the school with low levels of communication and personal skills. The effective assessment practices ensure that all children make good progress against the Early Learning Goals. This information is used well to plan the next steps in learning and to adapt the learning activities to meet each individual's specific learning needs. The children enjoy their learning, behave well and play harmoniously together and are considerate of each other. They mix well with the older pupils in their class and this has a positive effect on their language development and their personal and social skills. For instance, the children took great delight in helping each other prepare oranges for jelly-making in cookery. They communicated well, learned to share resources and everyone enjoyed a productive learning experience. Adults are good at building on children's responses to develop and increase their language and communication skills.

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They are vigilant about welfare and ensure that all groups have equal opportunities to access to the learning. The children feel safe and happy and are well cared for.

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

Views of parents and carers

There are good relationships with parents. Responses to the parent questionnaire were very positive. A few parents expressed concerns that resources were sometimes stretched. The overwhelming majority of parents reported their complete confidence in the school and the strength of the partnerships with their children's teacher. This enables them to support their child's learning and has a positive impact on the pupils' achievement. Parents' comments on questionnaires were overwhelmingly supportive. For example, one parent wrote, 'He's come on from a withdrawn, sad little boy to a happy confident boy who loves school.' Another parent stated, 'The progress she has made within a relatively short space of time has exceeded our expectations.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Herons Dale 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 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 53 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	73	3	20	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	73	4	27	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)	9	60	4	27	1	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	73	3	20	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	73	4	27	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 pupil's 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.



13 November 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Herons Dale School, Shoreham-by-Sea, BN43 6TN

Not long ago we came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make it better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting you in your classrooms and at lunchtime. We could see that you all enjoy school. We were only with you for two days, but it was long enough for us to realise that you go to a good school.

Here is a list of some of the things we particularly liked about your school:

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and your personal development.
- The many different people at the school look after you very well.
- You are involved in many interesting activities including those that help you become independent, make choices and learn all about different places and customs.
- All the adults work hard to give you as much help as possible and they are good at preparing interesting work for each of you.
- Your headteacher runs the school well and everyone, including your parents, gives her strong support.

We think the school could improve even further, in two ways:

- All the information about the small improvements you make during lessons should be used better to give you a clearer idea of what you need to do to improve your work.
- The governors of the school should find some more ways of checking that you are all getting on as well as you can.

Please thank your parents for the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Yours sincerely,

Melvyn Blackband

Lead inspector

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