

Walton Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124507
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359681
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	George Derby

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Jones
Headteacher	Duncan Gorwood
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2008
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Nineteen lessons were observed, representing 10 hours of teaching by 11 staff. Many of these were undertaken jointly with the senior staff. Meetings were held with groups of students, representatives of the governing body, senior staff and individual teachers. Inspectors observed the school's work, examined a range of documentation and looked at questionnaires completed by 34 parents and carers, 59 students and 16 staff.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average residential special school for students with moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties. A small number are autistic and some have behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties. Students with more complex needs have been admitted over the past three years. Those with the most needs are mainly taught in a building away from the main site. About a third of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The residential provision was inspected separately in March 2011, when it was judged to be satisfactory. The sixth form is taught in part of the residential accommodation separate from the main school. A third of students, including all those in the sixth form, were not on site during this inspection due to them undertaking residential or offsite activities. A new headteacher commenced at the beginning of January 2011. A staffing review is underway and a number of staff are due to leave or retire at the end of the summer term. The school gained performing arts specialist status in the last 12 months.

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	3
Achievement	3
Teaching	3
Leadership and management	3
Behaviour and safety	2
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

Key findings

The new headteacher provides excellent leadership and has been right to make important changes in order to secure a better education for students. He is very clear in what he wants to do and has identified the right things. Already, work has been undertaken to improve residential provision, increase accessibility for disabled students and to extend vocational opportunities on site. The senior team has been empowered; leaders have developed their skills rapidly and are fulfilling their responsibilities well to help with the improvements needed. The governing body is fully behind these, although in the past its members have been too accepting and have not examined the school's work thoroughly enough. Most staff agree that things should be done differently, so students learn better and make accelerated progress. Morale is generally good, although a few staff are less convinced about the way ahead. Already, work has been undertaken with teams to change the staffing structure so that all, including middle leaders, focus better on students' learning and progress.

The school is satisfactory and provides many students, especially those who are more able, with a good range of ways of gaining awards, such as entry level and GCSE for those who can succeed at this level. Overall, students achieve satisfactorily. Students in the sixth form do well and make good progress. This is because the sixth form is well run, their progress is well assessed and tracked regularly and the school prepares them well for extended education at a local college. This is not always the case elsewhere in the school. Teaching is satisfactory but in parts there is too much attention given to students completing activities and not enough to their learning or assessment. There are missed opportunities for the residential provision to support students' learning. The many performing arts activities on and off site, the residential visits, and the strong relationship between staff and students build students' characters and they develop well personally. They feel safe and secure and behave

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well. A weaker area is the attention given to those who are lower attaining or who have the most learning difficulties. Not enough is always done to include them fully in lessons, through activities matched to their needs, or in the life of the school as a whole.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, and where leadership and management is no better than satisfactory, may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to accelerate the learning and progress of all students aged 11 to 16 years, teachers and leaders, especially middle leaders, must consistently:
 - ensure there is a clear focus on their learning in lessons and in other activities, both in planning and teaching
 - provide every opportunity for students to develop skills, as far as they are able, to be independent learners such as through exploring, investigating, thinking deeply, problem solving and researching
 - assess and record their progress regularly throughout the year
 - use the information from a wide range of assessments in lessons and over time to plan work and make any necessary changes to programmes where students are exceeding their targets or are falling behind
 - include students in the assessments made so they know what they must do next and are involved in setting targets
 - match work closely to students' levels of attainment, ensuring that the approaches and activities are relevant for their level of need and development
 - provide opportunities for students to learn from each other, support each other and work collaboratively
 - guide teaching assistants appropriately so they are clear about their role in lessons and how they are to precisely support learning.

- For those students with the most needs:
 - provide a greater range of ways of including students fully in the life of the school
 - ensure that signs, symbols, objects and information and communication technology are used consistently in a way which enables them to communicate with others and for adults and other students to communicate with them
 - and especially for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, ensure every opportunity is provided for sensory exploration.

- Strengthen the curriculum further by:
 - ensuring that links between the residential provision and school are strong, that the boarding provision can demonstrate how it supports students' progress and that there are shared ways of working to support students to

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reach their personal targets
–extending on-site vocational opportunities.

Main report

Walton Hall is a harmonious community where students enjoy coming to school. Relationships between students are good. Behaviour is good, students feel safe and attendance is now in line with the national average for secondary schools. It has improved well over the last two terms, as has the reduction in students being sent out of class for minor misdemeanours. This is because of the effectiveness of the new behaviour policy and the fact that staff now accept responsibility for dealing with any issues. The large majority of parents and carers are happy with behaviour in the school and all agree that their children are safe. Safeguarding procedures meet all current government requirements. A very small amount of bullying occurs but students say, and inspectors observed, that any behaviour difficulties are dealt with swiftly by staff.

Students like the activities provided, especially those which involve music, dance and drama. Parents report that these have increased their children's interest and confidence further. Opportunities to reflect, think deeply and develop curiosity occur often in these subjects and also in science, although there are some missed opportunities elsewhere. The attention to performing arts, especially opportunities for older students, has had a good impact on their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, although the school has not yet thought enough about how activities can be used more creatively to support students' learning and communication throughout the school.

The curriculum provides a very wide range of activities which interest students, although there are a few missed opportunities. The work-related activities at the extensive farm on site and the leisure-based motorcycle facilities do not lead to any form of vocational accreditation, and links between the residence and school, to support a '24-hour curriculum' and students' learning and progress, have not been forged strongly enough.

The new headteacher provides very strong leadership in this school of many contrasts. He is highly ambitious for students, especially that they should be effective learners and that all should be fully included in activities and school life. The school is in a process of transition and senior leaders are driving forward changes rapidly, based on establishing a greater focus on learning by all staff. The governing body is now more effective in holding the school to account.

A small number of important aspects of the school's work lack consistency, and some areas for improvement at the time of the past school and residential inspections have yet to be tackled sufficiently. The headteacher has very quickly addressed a number of these, such as increasing residential staff training to help them understand the needs of students, and the governing body is now taking responsibility for monitoring

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residential provision. However, the needs of students with more severe or profound learning difficulties have not been fully addressed, and students in the main school are not consistently encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. The new headteacher's early analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses is perceptive and accurate.

Improving uniformity in the school's work is a key focus and the strong senior leadership team is driving forward ways to establish coherent systems. Clear strategic planning, with accurate key priorities relating to the assessment and tracking of students' progress and a review of staffing to provide effective middle leadership, focused on students' learning, are now beginning to be implemented. Senior leaders are determined to ensure that the needs of all students are fully met and that students with severe and profound learning difficulties are fully included in the work and life of the school. However, middle leaders have placed too much emphasis on subject development and not enough on learning and assessment. Because of the under-development of the work of some middle leaders, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good.

There are pockets of good provision which are key strengths of the school, such as in the rich provision in the sixth form and the attention to higher-attaining students gaining national awards. There is some considerable expertise and talent among staff which have supported a vast range of school initiatives and especially in performing arts.

Students' achievements are satisfactory. Due to their disabilities and special educational needs, their attainment is mostly below average and for a small, but significant, number is low. While some higher attaining students gained a good number of GCSE passes last year and some gained five A* to C grades, thus reaching the national expectation, overall students' progress in the main school is satisfactory and it is good in the sixth form. The progress of some of those who are lower attaining or with complex needs is less secure. Work is not always matched accurately to their needs and support for their communication and learning, through the use of signs, symbols, objects and information and communication technology is inconsistent.

Teaching is satisfactory overall but there is great variation in quality which stems from a lack of focus by some staff on learning. Occasionally, this is a weakness of planning rather than teachers not knowing what they want students to learn, but it does affect the accuracy of assessment. Where learning is good or outstanding, students are highly active participants, are challenged to think about what they are doing and how it could be better and are focused very well on developing their skills, knowledge and understanding. For instance, in a Year 9 music lesson, students worked tirelessly, with great enthusiasm, joy and considerable concentration to play their instruments accurately to a calypso rhythm in a 'round'. Where teaching is inadequate, activities are mundane, do not match students' needs or challenge them sufficiently. Sometimes, students are passive onlookers; they are always well behaved but not always actively involved. Occasionally, opportunities for students

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who have profound and multiple learning difficulties to use their senses to explore in a rigorous way in lessons are limited. Teachers do not always make clear to teaching assistants how they should support students' learning in lessons. There are excellent examples where the work of the teacher and assistant is seamless, such as in Year 10 and 11. However, in some lessons they are under-used and give out resources to students who are capable of getting these themselves.

The range of ways that staff assess students' learning is also inconsistent. Some of this stems from planning and lesson activities which focus too much on the completion of work rather than learning, and so learning is difficult to assess. There is too narrow a range of ways of checking on students' learning and little evidence of students setting and evaluating personal targets. In the sixth form, this is a strong feature and there are examples across the school where questioning is probing and thorough and deepens students' knowledge and understanding. In some lessons, though, teachers use too few ways to assess students' learning, and students have insufficient opportunities to evaluate their own or others' work. Often, in these lessons, teachers spend a great of time talking to students.

The oversight of the tracking of students' progress, its analysis and its use to improve learning has not been the responsibility of senior staff or middle leaders. This has meant it has been difficult for the governing body and leaders to gain a full overview, and for school staff to evaluate and explain the progress that students make. Except in the sixth form and a few subjects, such as design and technology and science, students' levels of attainment are recorded and tracked formally on an annual basis only, and not on a regular basis throughout the year. In a few, such as a modern foreign language and humanities, there is very limited information. In addition, except in the sixth form, the school does not have a clear view of students' starting points because new students are assessed only at the end of a year. Radical changes are now being implemented to provide systematic assessment information across all areas of the school to support students' progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Walton Hall 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 134 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	20	59	13	38	0	0	0	0
Q2 My child feels safe at school	17	50	15	44	0	0	0	0
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	19	56	12	35	1	3	0	0
Q4 The school meets my child's particular needs	16	47	15	44	1	3	0	0
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	18	53	16	47	0	0	0	0
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	19	56	13	38	0	0	0	0
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	14	41	13	38	1	3	0	0
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	12	35	13	38	3	9	0	0
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	16	47	11	32	2	6	0	0
Q10 The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	47	12	35	2	6	0	0
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	14	41	15	44	2	6	1	3
Q12 The school is well led and managed	19	56	8	24	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 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 achievement of all pupils.■ Behaviour and safety.■ The quality of teaching.■ The effectiveness of leadership and management. <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
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.

26 May 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Walton Hall School, Stafford, ST21 6JR

Thank you for spending time to the talk with us during the inspection of your school. We told the headteacher and the governing body that your school is satisfactory. There are some good parts to the school but some areas which need improvement.

Your achievement is satisfactory. Many older students achieve a good range of qualifications such as Entry Level and GCSE and the sixth form students do well to achieve what they do. The many activities that you do in school, out of school and in residence help you to grow in confidence and self-esteem. Some of these, though, could help you more with your learning and your ability to learn to read, write, talk and listen. The DVD your school has produced shows especially well how older students often excel in music and drama, which you clearly enjoy. We saw you learning really well in music during our visit. The headteacher wants you to have more opportunities to gain awards from practical work on the farm, through motorcycling and motor vehicle maintenance, and we agree.

Your headteacher has already done a lot to make the school better for you. Lessons run smoothly and disruption to lessons is rare. You behave well and feel safe in school. The teaching you get is satisfactory overall but it is good in the sixth form. Sometimes there is too much focus on you completing work in lessons and not enough on how well you are learning. We want you to learn faster and extend your skills further so you can learn more on your own. We also want the staff to assess more regularly what you are achieving and the progress you make. This is so help can be provided where it is needed.

We found that those of you who need a lot of help with your learning, communication and physically should be more involved in the life of the school. The use of signs, symbols, objects and computers help you to understand what is happening and to make your needs known. However, these are not used by everyone regularly enough.

What impressed us particularly was your keenness to learn and your enjoyment in lessons. We think the staff need to find more ways so you are all involved by work and activities that are the right ones for you. You can help by thinking about how you can improve your own work and also assessing how well others have done theirs, when you are asked.

Yours sincerely

George Derby
Lead inspector

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