

Strathmore School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102954
Local Authority	Richmond Upon Thames
Inspection number	323717
Inspection date	12 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	36
Sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Leonard
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Nanasi
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2006
School address	Meadlands Drive Petersham Richmond TW10 7ED
Telephone number	020 8948 0047
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for students with severe learning difficulties and a small number with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are increasing numbers of students with additional needs caused by autistic spectrum conditions. Half of the students are White British in origin and the other students come from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. A small minority of students are from homes where English is not the first language. The school has gained several national awards for its work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Strathmore School provides an outstanding education for its students. It has improved on its performance since the previous inspection in several key areas. The school's leadership and staff have worked successfully to further improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum, the effectiveness of assessment, and the tracking of the students' performance. Consequently, the achievement of the students has improved still further since the previous report. Their attainment remains well below that expected in mainstream schools, but all the students do well in their studies and many make outstanding progress. The students in post-16 provision, and those with additional learning needs such as autism or profound and multiple difficulties, make excellent progress. The quality of teaching has consistently improved since the previous inspection and is outstanding throughout the school. Lessons are exceptionally well planned, and the students' progress is assessed and recorded to a very high standard. Teamwork is excellent and students receive very good support from well-trained classroom assistants. As a result, they enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. The tracking of students' progress is exemplary. This enables senior staff and subject leaders to quickly identify strengths in the students' learning and to intervene appropriately and decisively when any slight slowdown is detected in their performance.

The curriculum is outstanding because teachers tailor activities very effectively to students' needs and abilities. As a result, students tackle challenging activities with interest and enthusiasm. These activities range from experiences at a sensory level for students with profound disabilities to specific courses leading to nationally accredited qualifications. Students benefit greatly from the school's expertise in providing for their progress in communication. Teachers make excellent use of signs and symbols to provide visual clues for students with autism, and those with speech and language difficulties. This has the very beneficial effect of reducing the students' confusion and frustration, and enables them to focus more easily on learning activities and to make better progress. The emphasis on the development of communication also has a positive impact on those students who are at the earliest stages of learning English. There are very productive links with mainstream schools, which greatly enhance the students' social understanding. The school has made creative use of local facilities to overcome the limitations of the present accommodation. Provision to teach the older students about the world of work and possibilities for further training is a strength and consistently results in all the leavers going on to further education. There are very good opportunities for students in Year 11 and in post-16 provision to gain national accreditation, including the Duke of Edinburgh's award, although leaders are seeking ways to extend the range of qualifications further to meet the future needs of a greater number of students with additional learning needs.

The students thrive within the caring ethos of the school. All of them make excellent progress in their personal development. It underpins their excellent attitudes to learning and helps them to achieve their full potential. Students feel well supported and become confident learners. Teachers place a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education (PSHE), and this encourages the students to respect and value themselves and others. They learn to remain healthy and to keep themselves safe. They value their school, and this is reflected in the excellent relationships they have with staff, and their very good attendance. Parents feel confident that their children enjoy school and that it has high expectations of their achievements. One parent commented about her daughter, 'She has made huge progress in all areas.'

The headteacher's substantial expertise and experience, complemented by the skills of the deputy headteacher, have driven the continuing improvement. The school evaluates its work extremely well. It seeks and acts on the views of all who are connected with the school. The governing body is supportive and monitors the school's work effectively and robustly. There is an outstanding capacity to improve further because of the school's rigorous self-evaluation and the determination of the governors and staff to provide the best possible service for the pupils. The school therefore provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make excellent progress in their personal development because of well-planned procedures to help them gain the necessary self-confidence and independence to make their own choices and to prepare for adult life. Excellent teaching results in many of them continuing to make outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy, in their life skills, and in their grasp of work-related learning. The students are able to achieve their potential through a range of accredited and challenging qualifications. Leaders are reviewing the range and scope of these qualifications to ensure that they fully reflect the changing needs of the student population. As a result of their excellent progress, all the students leave with the confidence and skills to go into further education. The provision is managed very well.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant weaknesses. The inspector agrees with the school's intention to extend and adapt the range of accredited qualifications to ensure that it continues to meet the additional needs of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All students achieve very well and many make outstanding progress, although, because of their learning difficulties, their attainment remains far below that expected of mainstream students. Those making outstanding progress are from all sections of the school population, including the students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with autistic conditions. The students who are at the earliest stages of learning English receive especially well-targeted support and, because of this, they make progress at the same rate as the other students. There is no evidence of underachievement by any group of students or individuals. Students make particularly good progress in learning the basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy. As a result of their outstanding progress, the students in Year 11 and those in post-16 education are able to gain a range of nationally accredited qualifications. Most students make excellent progress in meeting their challenging individual education targets in basic skills and in personal development. This has a significant impact on their excellent overall achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' excellent progress in personal development reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and emphasis on moral and social values. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The students consistently help their less confident friends in the playground, and always express their pleasure and support when one of their friends does something well. They experience an exceptionally rich variety of cultural

experiences, for instance from visiting performers, such as the Flamenco dancer who demonstrated her skills and taught basic steps to pupils during 'Spanish Week'. The students gradually develop an excellent awareness of the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. They make very good gains in their social skills through taking part in the many communal activities in school and in the many trips and visits, which they greatly enjoy; and also by becoming involved in sporting and cultural activities in the wider local area. Their understanding of community cohesiveness is further enhanced through their consideration of different faiths in curriculum activities, during trips to places of worship, and in assemblies. Students in 14-19 education make excellent progress in acquiring valuable life skills through work experience and effective careers provision. Students feel safe within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere, grow in confidence, and know what is expected from them. Behaviour and attendance are outstanding because students enjoy school so much. Those students who were spoken to were emphatic that they felt free from bullying or unpleasantness, and that they really looked forward to coming to school. The parents who returned questionnaires were unanimous in their unqualified praise for the school and its impact on their children's lives. Parents used phrases such as 'School is a place where each child and young person is special and important', and 'Ten out of ten for Strathmore!'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching standards are exceptionally good throughout the school, and this has a very substantial impact on the students' achievement. The students like their teachers and the support staff, enjoy their lessons, and consequently try their best. Teachers capture each small step in progress that students make, and this leads to very well-focused targets for each student's further improvement. As a result of excellent planning, the support staff have a clear understanding of what the students should learn in each lesson, and the best way to ensure that they do. They are thus able to give a very high degree of focused individual support. Teachers and support staff have gained considerable expertise in using techniques to develop and encourage the students' communication skills and to provide for those with autism. This significantly enhances the students' involvement in learning activities, and their progress. The management of behaviour is excellent. Students understand and respond to clear routines. When a student's behaviour occasionally becomes unacceptable, it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the student involved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because activities have been effectively adapted from National Curriculum programmes and tailored very specifically to the learning needs of each student. The students' targets are exceptionally well focused and precise and this, along with excellent teaching, leads to their outstanding progress. There is a range of very good programmes for students in post-16 provision, and there are particularly good arrangements for work-related learning. Programmes in PSHE underpin much of the school's work, and these have a considerable impact on the students' achievement in personal skills, and their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety. The school's excellent provision for the development of students' communication and other basic skills is extremely effective in promoting their access to learning opportunities. There is a wide range of activities which

take students out of the classroom, such as visits to the National Portrait Gallery and a residential trip to Paris, teaching them self-confidence and how to behave appropriately in the community. This adds substantially to their social skills and their interest in learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The safeguarding of students is the greatest priority for school staff. Procedures in child protection and in the recruitment of staff are very secure. The students respond very well to the way that staff discuss with them how well they are doing in their work and personal development, and how they can improve their attainments. As a result, they have an excellent understanding of how to make their work better and this has a very positive impact on their achievement. Parents receive accurate and comprehensive progress reports, and maintain a high degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in their children's education. The students receive good advice and support as they are about to leave school, and staff very successfully prepare them to move onto appropriate college courses.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Excellent leadership and management have enabled the school to build on the good provision found at the previous inspection. Leaders have continued to be rigorous and successful in helping the students to develop a very good understanding of their immediate and more distant communities, and a commitment to their cohesiveness. One of the school's many strengths lies in the analytical way that managers monitor, evaluate and improve on every aspect of the students' academic and personal achievement. For instance, the assessment and tracking of students' progress is exemplary. There are very effective procedures to measure and improve the performance of teachers and other staff, and these are securely focused on improving achievement still further. There is a high level of professional training for all staff, which effectively shares and enhances the levels of expertise within the school.

Governors provide excellent support to the school. They ensure that they both join in classroom activities and help supervise trips, and that they fully understand the school's work. They work closely with individual staff and they rigorously monitor the school's strengths and areas for development.

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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	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Strathmore School, Richmond, TW10 7ED

Not long ago I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome, and I enjoyed meeting some of you in your classrooms and at lunchtime in the Valentine's disco. Thank you and well done. I could see that you all enjoy school very much. I was with you for one day. That was long enough for me to realise that you go to an outstanding school. Here is a list of some of the things I particularly liked about your school.

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

The school could improve even further if teachers developed courses to make sure that those of you who need a bit more help will have plenty of qualifications to aim at as you move up the school.

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

Best wishes to you all,

Yours faithfully

Mel Blackband

Lead Inspector