

Strathmore School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	102954
Local authority	Richmond
Inspection number	376786
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2012
Lead inspector	Charles Hackett

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Roscoe
Headteacher	Ivan Pryce
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2009
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Age group	7–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Charles Hackett

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited 11 lessons, observing eight teachers. Meetings were held with staff and a member of the governing body. Discussions were held with students about their work and their views of the school.

The inspector took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at students' work and information on their progress; safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires completed by 16 parents and carers, 26 staff and six students were scrutinised.

Information about the school

Strathmore is a smaller-than-average special school, although its numbers on roll have increased over the last year. It caters for students with complex learning difficulties. Many of these students have severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. There are a few pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The number eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Only a very small number of students are in the care of the local authority. Recently there have been significant changes to the school leadership team. The headteacher was appointed two years ago and a new deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers started at the beginning of the current academic year.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Strathmore is a good school. The ambition and drive of its new leadership team is already having an impressively positive impact on the quality of the school's provision and the achievements of students.
- Students achieve well. They make particularly good progress in developing their communication skills. This increases their confidence and participation in a wide range of social, sporting and cultural events. The sixth form is good, which ensures these students are prepared well for the next stage in their lives.
- Students behave extremely well throughout the school. Those who join with challenging behaviour improve their responses to a range of different situations over time. They are managed very well by staff and this creates a very safe and welcoming environment within the school. The excellent promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development further supports the positive impact the school has on the lives of its students.
- Teaching is good and includes examples of outstanding practice, particularly in the close monitoring of the small steps of progress students make. The use of specialist teaching techniques is particularly effective in engaging students with autistic spectrum disorders in learning. There are, though, a few occasions when teaching is less effective because the activities students are engaged in are not as finely tuned as they could be to students' previous progress and the specific needs of each student.
- The new school leadership team has brought increased rigour to the monitoring of the school's performance. The headteacher, together with his strong senior team, leads a staff team with a vision for excellence. Parents and carers fully support these efforts and are full of praise for the school. The governing body clearly seeks to support the school but is not sufficiently involved or knowledgeable about its work to be in a position to contribute sufficiently to hold it to account.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2012, raise the quality and impact of teaching so that all pupils make

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even better progress through:

- ensuring that all teachers plan lessons that take account of students' prior achievements and focus precisely on the individual needs of each student
 - ensuring all teachers follow the examples of excellent practice in the school of constantly recording in lessons students' achievements and the level of help provided.
- By September 2012, increase the role played by the governing body in the school's pursuit of excellence through:
- increasing its contributions and involvement in the monitoring and evaluating of the school's provision and the outcomes for students
 - increasing its participation in the implementation of well-focused improvement plans.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The achievement of students, including those in the sixth form is good. Parents and carers fully endorse this view. Very appropriately, the school has a strong focus on developing students' communication skills. This is very effective and results in students increasingly being able to communicate their needs to others. There are many examples of students communicating verbally for the first time and of others starting to use picture exchange symbols to communicate their needs. In lessons, students with severe learning difficulties and those with autistic spectrum disorders used either picture exchange symbols or Makaton signs to express their needs. Those students with the capacity to read make good progress. A sixth form student, for example, read with clarity and intonation his record of achievements over the last year, while another younger student with advanced mechanical reading skills showed how he was starting to follow and understand the content of a story through reading a book with pop-up images.

Students also make good progress in mathematics. Many are starting to identify numbers and enjoy joining in number counting songs. A Key Stage 2 class, for example, successfully counted down from five to one frogs jumping off a wall. Individual students operating at a higher level also achieve well; a Key Stage 2 student successfully showing the inspector a half and a quarter segments of a circle. Progress is such that in Key Stage 3, a higher-performing group were able to count in pairs up to 30. Older students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form become more familiar with using money. One student explaining to the inspector how she counts the coins needed for drinks in both the school and the college cafe. Progress in lessons is not as evident when the planned activities are not sufficiently linked to the individual needs of students and their prior achievements.

The achievements of the different groups within the school are very similar, with boys and girls progressing at similar good rates. The very small number of students admitted who are in the care of the local authority make the same good progress as

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other students.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and there are pockets of outstanding practice. Parents, carers and students themselves have a positive view of teaching and the curriculum offered and appreciate the support they receive. Throughout the curriculum, teachers use specialist teaching skills to extremely good effect. For example, a pupil with very little ability in responding to others interacted very well with his teacher, who was using a specialist technique known as 'intensive interaction'. Pupils are encouraged to communicate by whatever means best suits their needs. This can involve a range of strategies, such as verbal comments, exchanging picture symbols and Makaton signing. Staff are now proficient in all of these following recent staff training and in-house support. The use of Makaton signing is applied very consistently and students are able to follow the routines of each day through the visual timetables that are highly prominent throughout the school.

Teachers usually plan in great detail for each teaching session. They focus very closely on enabling students to make small steps of progress in completing different activities. This results in lessons providing students with opportunities to engage in individually selected tasks. These usually match activities to students' different abilities. In a number lesson, for example, one student was dropping a ball down a chute to consolidate his understanding of one, whilst another was finding the missing numbers in a sequence of numbers up to 30. In the very best lessons, careful observation notes are made to not only record success, but note if help or prompting was needed. Occasionally, it is not clear from the planning what it is hoped students will learn from taking part in some activities, and the recording of progress is limited.

Teaching assistants work very well alongside the teachers. They are familiar with the learning objectives for each activity and are able to work independently with students on set tasks. All staff have very positive relationships with students and this successfully encourages students to try new ideas and work hard to achieve. These very secure relationships with students help create positive learning environments in the classroom. These facilitate the good promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour over time and the safety of students are outstanding. Parents and carers fully recognise this, appreciating the high quality of care and support in the school that facilitates this. Students relate well to each other, showing respect and dignity. Many of those on the autistic spectrum are able to engage and cooperate with each other in a way in which they have not been able to previously. Students show good attitudes in the classrooms, often looking forward excitedly to the many activities they will engage in. Two Key Stage 2 pupils using a water tray to learn the difference between 'a little' and 'a lot', for example, thoroughly enjoyed taking turns

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and sharing the equipment. Similarly, at breaktimes, students enjoy the company of each other and, whether safely riding on the bikes around their imitation racetrack or using the play equipment, they appear relaxed and settled. Students show by their actions in and out of the classroom that they are increasing their own awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe. Many are beginning to verbalise what is good behaviour. In an English lesson, students were able to pick out from a range of picture symbols good and bad behaviour for the classroom. They enjoyed making the 'no score' sound of a well-known television family quiz programme for the behaviours they regarded as bad.

There are no concerns with regard to any form of bullying within the school. Staff report there may be a few occasions when students are reluctant to share equipment or finish their turn on an activity but these are quickly resolved. Students with challenging behaviour can become distressed but detailed behaviour support plans are proving to be effective and evidence shows that for all such pupils, incidents are being reduced. The attendance of students is above average and parents report how their children look forward to coming to school.

Leadership and management

There is strong evidence that the school has improved the quality of its work since its last inspection and that it has a good capacity to sustain these improvements. The new senior team has built on the secure atmosphere of care and concern that existed previously and added greater rigour to the evaluation and monitoring of the school's performance. Very effective work has been done to bring improvements to the quality of teaching. This is already showing an impact in the outstanding practice that exists and the consistent use of Makaton across the school. Staff have good opportunities for professional training to develop their skills. The courses completed recently have all had a very strong focus on giving staff the specialist skills to impact positively whatever the complexity of the needs of the students.

The school's curriculum has been revised and is already showing improvements in the increased range of subjects being covered within the themes for each term. The key focus on communication, including reading, where appropriate, is embedded across the curriculum through students' individual communication targets and communication booklets. An increased emphasis is being given to the use of information and communication technology, with the addition of interactive plasma screens and the recent acquisition of 'iPads'. The curriculum for the sixth form is very relevant and, from conversations with students, thoroughly enjoyed. It prepares them well for college or sheltered employment when they leave school. The one downside is the limitation of the current building, which reduces the opportunities for an increased number of age-appropriate activities. The school promotes students spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through the many activities that students can participate in and the positive learning environment within the school.

Individual members of the governing body are passionate about the school but current systems mean the governing body does not have sufficient information on

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the school's performance to be in a position to monitor and challenge the quality of its work. This in turn limits its ability to decide on the appropriate priorities for improvements within the school development plan. A strong focus is put on safety and safeguarding, to ensure that all students are safe and secure in the school. The excellent knowledge staff have on each student is used very well to ensure equality of opportunity and eliminate any possibility of any form of discrimination.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



12 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Strathmore School, Richmond TW10 7ED

Thank you for your kindness when I visited your school recently. I know reading this will be hard for many of you but I know the school staff and your parent and carers will help. I really enjoyed meeting so many of you and looking at your work. You will not be surprised to know that I have judged your school to be good.

I consider both your achievements and the quality of teaching to be good. The success so many of you have in improving your communication is great to see. I judge that your behaviour and safety, and your spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, to all be outstanding.

In many ways, the school has improved since its last inspection. Much of this is due to the good leadership and management of the headteacher and the new senior staff. It is clear that all the staff work well together and are keen to enable you all to achieve as much as possible. To be even better, I have recommended two areas of improvement to the school:

- Make sure all the teaching helps you to make really good progress.
- The governing body should offer more support in making sure the school achieves its ambition to be excellent.

Once again, thank you for making my job so enjoyable when I came to visit.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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