



# Blakebrook School

Inspection Report - Amended

**Unique Reference Number** 117053  
**Local Authority** Worcestershire  
**Inspection number** 290700  
**Inspection date** 31 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Julia Coop

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Bewdley Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Kidderminster
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2-19		DY11 6RL
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01562 753066
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	58	<b>Fax number</b>	01562 824533
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	12		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Peter Pickin
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Michael Russell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2001		

<b>Age group</b> 2-19	<b>Inspection date</b> 31 January 2007	<b>Inspection number</b> 290700
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## **Amended Report Addendum**

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Blakebrook is an all-age day special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and autism. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Since the last inspection there has been an increase in the proportion of younger pupils with more complex learning needs and a specialist PMLD unit has been built. The school serves a wide, socially mixed area and a high proportion of pupils are looked after by a number of different local authorities. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds. The local authority is in the process of reorganising special educational provision. This has resulted in a large staff turnover. The school has been prevented from appointing permanent members of staff since 2004. The headteacher was seconded to work within the local authority for 18 months, returning in January 2006.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

'An excellent school that makes every child and family feel special, so that whatever the difficulties, each child makes wonderful progress.' This comment from one parent echoes the views of most parents and the inspection confirms that Blakebrook is an outstanding school. Despite the challenges faced by an uncertain future and many staff changes, the school has not rested on its laurels and gone from strength to strength since the last inspection. This is due to the drive and determination of the outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher has created a high quality team of staff so that even in his absence, the school continued to move forward. New staff have quickly developed their skills, because of highly appropriate professional development opportunities, so that all staff are very well equipped to use a wide variety of teaching approaches. As a result, teaching and curriculum are of the highest quality because staff are extremely skilled in moulding the curriculum in the best possible way to suit the individual learning needs of all groups of pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school are extremely warm, caring and supportive. As a result, although standards are exceptionally low, because of the pupils' complex needs, their achievements and personal development and well-being are excellent. Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding and from there to post-16, all groups of pupils make exceptional progress and thrive in this highly effective learning environment. As one parent commented, 'My child enjoys school so much because he knows that those who work with him support and genuinely care for him.'

It would be difficult to make the provision for pupils' support, care and guidance any better. This exemplary care, coupled with very effective relationships with therapists, colleges, the wider community and careers officers, ensures that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, receive the highest level of care and support. Consequently, pupils are helped to make sensible decisions and all the pupils are very well prepared for life beyond Blakebrook. A major touchstone in the school's success is the way that it 'only looks forward' and has used every nook and cranny to adapt its provision to meet the changing needs of the pupils. Governors are very supportive. Financial management is astute and they have been highly proactive in helping to resolve recruitment difficulties. Some are knowledgeable and work more closely with the school. Plans are in hand to enable governors to develop their skills further in holding the school to account. The school analyses data relating to pupils' progress carefully and use this information very successfully to target support where it is needed. However, the school does not yet work with other similar schools to compare its performance. These are missed opportunities to fine-tune monitoring and evaluation procedures so as to support further improvements. As a result of these two factors, the school is modest in the evaluation of its performance. Nevertheless, because of the track record of improvements the school has plenty of scope to go from strength to strength. Therefore, its capacity for further improvement is good.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The post-16 department makes very good provision for its pupils who say that it is 'brilliant'. The high quality of teaching and leadership and management accounts for the pupils' excellent achievements. With support from an external organisation the pupils are learning very successfully how to express their thoughts and opinions in 'self advocacy sessions'. As a result of this and the very good care, guidance and support they receive, alongside many opportunities to gain accreditations, they develop independent living skills, including skills to work in the community. They grow in confidence and independence as a result of this high quality provision. The school is rightly planning to develop the curriculum by increasing the opportunities for the pupils to select their own options. However, it is a measure of the success of the provision that all leavers either go on to undertake further college courses or join assisted work placements and leave as mature young adults.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Work more closely with other similar special schools to benchmark performance and sharpen the monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Develop the skills of the governing body so they can monitor the school's work more effectively.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

As a result of their significant and complex learning needs, pupils' standards are exceptionally low. However, due to the exceptional care and support they receive and carefully adapted outstanding teaching, pupils' achievements are excellent. Pupils, irrespective of their gender or severity of their learning difficulties and disabilities, make outstanding progress against the targets set for them, including those looked after by the local authority. Children in the Foundation Stage make exceptional progress, particularly in their social skills, because of the highly effective learning environment. Pupils with severe learning difficulties move from working at below National Curriculum levels on the P scales to gaining success on a wide range of nationally accredited awards, with some passing art at GCSE. Pupils with PMLD and those with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) make outstanding progress in communicating and in developing their social skills because of the specialised teaching approaches used. Parents comment that their children have made 'wonderful progress' and value highly the way that the school 'goes out of its way to meet the challenges posed'.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

#### Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils say they 'love coming to this school' and the pupils' obvious enjoyment of learning is shown by a sea of smiling, happy faces in each class. Attendance is very good especially considering the impact that serious medical conditions can have. Pupils feel very safe because the atmosphere around the school is calm and friendly. All staff have developed very well established routines that provide structure and very clear boundaries. As a result, pupils understand what is expected of them, so that they do not get frustrated, confused or anxious if someone shows distress because of their learning disability. Members of the school council are very effective advocates for the school and the healthy tuck shop they established and run is a great hit. Pupils who will only eat certain foods are sensitively encouraged to try healthier options and the school works closely with parents to establish healthier eating plans. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils show tolerance and understanding of others and an exceptional community spirit through activities such as writing prayers for the 'prayer tree', lots of community activities and celebrating different faith festivals. They show increasing self-confidence and develop necessary skills for the future through the very wide range of opportunities provided including the teaching of essential living skills and vocational activities such as Young Enterprise.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 1

#### Grade for sixth form: 1

A key reason why the pupils do so well is the very careful adaptation of activities to meet the individual learning needs of pupils. Lessons are planned in great detail and matched very carefully to each pupil's individual 'key skill target' as well as developing subject skills. PMLD pupils are introduced to learning through a wealth of sensory experiences. Staff show patience and care using perfumes, music, sounds, lights and massage as part and parcel of daily activities that have developed remarkable responses from the pupils. For example parents comment that their children who were non-verbal can now interact with them. In contrast, ASD pupils have a highly structured routine that provides the boundaries and security that these pupils require to learn successfully. As a result some now attend lessons with their peers. Throughout, relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Learning, including the development of communication skills, is significantly enhanced by the use throughout the school of alternative means of communication including manual signing, pictorial symbols and electronic devices including interactive whiteboards and new technologies. Staff work very effectively as a team and this ensures that learning is seamless and pupils are not afraid to try new things. The seniors, for example, responded extremely well to a sex education

lesson because of the humour and sensitivity of staff. As one parent commented, 'The staff have turned the school from what was a respite centre into a place for learning.'

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Another key reason for the pupils doing really well is that the curriculum is very well suited to all the different groups of pupils and this provides a strong basis to work from. The school rightly focuses on developing communication and basic skills, which are important in developing economic well-being. The very wide range of work experience opportunities and accredited courses significantly enhance future opportunities. Working closely together, staff constantly review and adapt the curriculum to suit the changing needs of the pupils. They are currently working to ensure that curriculum areas are linked as much as possible to further maximise learning and enhance enjoyment. Pupils not only have carefully thought out activities within their class base, but many also have opportunities to learn in their local mainstream schools or in college alongside their peers. This is a strength that not only supports the development of key academic skills, but very effectively supports the development of social and independence skills. The opportunity for older pupils to learn Spanish and visit Spain is one example of how staff go out of their way to enhance learning experiences. An extensive range of visits, a huge array of sporting activities, after school and weekend clubs, alongside a very well planned personal, social, health and citizenship curriculum all serve to bring the curriculum alive, make learning really enjoyable and help pupils to understand their own and others' needs.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The excellent pastoral provision is a considerable contributor to the pupils' success in learning and personal development. The very strong emphasis on care and support for individuals with complex learning and medical needs and practical commitment of staff to ensuring the health and well-being of pupils is exemplary. Multi-agency work is very well established and the personal education plans for looked after pupils are very well thought out. Staff are confident to use positive handling techniques for pupils who can display challenging behaviour and individual behaviour plans are simple, but effective. Partnerships nurtured with parents, carers and therapists and constant and rigorous checking contributes enormously to the pupils' sense of well-being, and helps ensure a continuity of care and support. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and parents are very confident that all staff show 'care and respect' for their children at all times.

Very high quality guidance and support sensitively and very effectively focus on the needs of each individual. All pupils have highly relevant individual profiles that together provide staff with a detailed picture of each pupil. These include a profile of 'preferred

learning styles', 'behaviour' and 'positive characteristics' to reinforce the pupils' strengths and develop a pride in themselves and their achievements. These are used by teachers to plan lessons and guide learning, and are a significant factor in the success pupils achieve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The school could not be where it is today without high quality leadership and management. Despite an uncertain future and restrictions on staff appointments, morale is high. All staff share a common sense of purpose and are highly committed to developing their skills further for the benefit of the pupils. This is because the headteacher has created a climate and shared vision in which all those connected to the school work enthusiastically to make this an excellent learning environment for all of the pupils. The focus on individual needs at all levels in the school is outstanding. This has meant that despite a changing pupil population achievement is now excellent and pupils are making much better progress than at the time of the last inspection. Staff are more skilled in using technologies to support learning and teaching is also much improved. Strong systems for monitoring teaching and learning help to sustain the very high quality. The deputy headteacher and other senior managers also have a skilful and determined approach. They did not let the grass grow under their feet when the headteacher was seconded, and because management systems are very well established the momentum of improvement was maintained. A testament to this is the newly built multi-sensory base for PMLD pupils arriving from another school, which also provides very well thought out opportunities for PMLD pupils to join with their peers in social and academic activities, and has benefited all exceptionally well.

The way that the school checks on learning has also improved. The school analyses pupils' progress in detail and sensibly tracks their progress over two years. The school carefully analyses the learning of different ages and groups so that they are able to spot trends and plug gaps in learning or provision. However, they do not benchmark this data with other schools. Few staff visit other special schools and consequently because the school is in a rural location it is working in an isolated way and is unable to compare its performance. Similarly, although governance is good, the governors do not challenge the headteacher enough to show how good the school really is. As a result, the school's self-evaluation is too modest, and monitoring of performance is good rather than outstanding.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 disabilities make progress	1	

### Personal development and well-being

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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	2	
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	

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

We very much enjoyed our time with you and would like to thank you for helping us to find out about your school. Yours is an outstanding school. We liked these things most

You really enjoy being at school and love learning. We think the curriculum and teaching are outstanding and help you learn very well. We were very impressed with the way the school cares for you and helps you become responsible young people when you leave. We think that you must have a really good time in all the extra activities. The school council are very helpful and are very good advocates for you all. Everyone works very hard to make Blakebrook an excellent place to learn.

- There are two things that we want the staff and governors to do to ensure Blakebrook stays an excellent school.
- Teachers at Blakebrook should look at how well other similar schools are doing and learn from this.
- Governors should become more involved in watching over what the school does.

We hope that you go on enjoying learning and trying hard and we wish you all good luck for the future. It was a real pleasure to meet you all.