

Fort Royal

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131534
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	328607
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Seymour
Acting headteacher	Jane Long
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable
School address	Wylds Lane Worcester WR5 1DR
Telephone number	01905 355525
Fax number	01905 358867

Age group	2–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Fort Royal is a large special school for pupils with all types of learning difficulty and disability. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds spread over a wide area of Worcestershire. Almost all are of White British heritage, with a very small minority from a range of other minority ethnic groups. The great majority of pupils have moderate or severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or autistic spectrum disorders. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) consists of a Nursery assessment unit, and two Reception classes. The school opened in September 2007 taking the primary-aged pupils from an amalgamation of three all-age special schools. The pupils are situated in an existing building, whilst the new purpose-built school is constructed on the site. The headteacher is on long-term sick leave and the school is run by an acting headteacher, who has been in post since September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve.

Significant improvement is required in relation to the progress made by pupils, the quality of teaching, the use of assessment, and teachers' specialist skills. The school also requires significant improvement in the same areas in relation to the EYFS.

The atmosphere in the school is calm, orderly and very friendly. Pupils enjoy coming to school and most parents are very positive about the benefits it brings to their children's lives. As one pupil commented, 'This school is like a family.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Standards are well below the national average throughout the school because of the nature of pupils' learning difficulties. The school has been through a turbulent time since it opened in September 2007 and, as a consequence, the quality of teaching, pupils' achievements and the progress they make is inadequate. This situation is improving. Leadership and management at all levels are now satisfactory, with strengthened morale and a commitment to improvement by all staff. Very strong leadership from the acting headteacher has established a great many systems which have improved the quality of teaching and the progress made in a large majority of lessons. These changes are very recent, although the impact is already evident, with a significant reduction in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Most importantly, effective steps have been taken to assess each learner's achievements and set targets for them to reach. This is embedded in classroom practice and carefully monitored. Teachers now know what pupils are expected to learn in each lesson, and pupils are involved well in this.

A small minority of staff lack the specific skills necessary to teach pupils with different types of learning difficulty such as autism or more severe and complex needs. This is also being addressed with additional training and mentoring. It is very early in the process and there remain a reduced, but still unacceptable, number of lessons where pupils' learning is too slow. The school ensures that pupils are kept safe and staff are dedicated in the good care they provide to meet pupils' personal needs. As a result, pupils behave well, usually work hard in lessons and are very kind and helpful to each other. Staff successfully ensure that pupils meet and learn to respect people different to themselves. The academic guidance given, however, is inadequate because the new systems to measure and track progress are not yet being used effectively in all classes.

The newly organised curriculum is satisfactory in supporting the pupils' academic and personal development. For example, there are sound opportunities provided for pupils to contribute to the community; those on the Eco committee in particular work hard to make sure things are recycled and that electricity is not wasted. Provision to support pupils' understanding of how to keep safe and healthy is good and they take plenty of exercise. Despite the inadequacies, Fort Royal provides a positive and improving educational experience for the majority of pupils.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 4

Provision in the EYFS is inadequate. Although a large majority of children make satisfactory progress in lessons, too many do not. As yet, the school has no clear idea of just how much progress children are making over time. Teaching is inadequate overall. Some staff are still developing their understanding of the full range of children's needs and how to address them. This situation is improving, with much clearer records of children's achievements in all the areas of learning being kept and evidence of sound and good progress emerging. In particular, the better use of signs and symbols by staff has led to increased communication by the children.

Good links with parents ensures a smooth and happy start. Lessons are full of busy children choosing between a range of enjoyable activities and spending time working with the teacher. One group had great fun independently organising a tea party, while others were learning to make circles and triangles in sand. Despite temporary difficulties of access, teachers work hard to create a suitable balance between inside and outside learning.

Satisfactory personal development and care for children's needs includes sound links with other agencies. Children begin to take successful early steps in socialising with others in the Nursery. There is a good emphasis on encouraging independence and as a result by the time they leave, Reception children have become much more confident. As with the rest of the school, satisfactory leadership and management have resulted in accurate identification of the shortcomings and recent, but clear, improvements in the quality of provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching and the progress made by all learners, including those in the EYFS, are at least satisfactory.
- Improve consistency in the use of assessment, in all age groups, to measure and guide pupils' learning and progress.
- Develop teachers' specialist skills, to meet pupils' needs, in the full range of learning difficulties, throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Attainment on entry is well below national average because of the learning difficulties children experience. Although satisfactory for the large majority, achievement and progress are inadequate for too many pupils of all abilities in English, mathematics and science. This is true for those in the EYFS and for those aged 7 to 11. For pupils aged five to seven, progress and achievement are at least satisfactory. The school has recognised the inadequacies and has taken effective steps to begin improving pupils' achievements. These improvements are particularly evident in communication skills, writing and mathematics, where far more pupils now make good progress. At break time, for example, many more pupils are using

symbols to tell the teacher what they would like to eat or drink, and some, by using signs, are beginning to join in with their peers for the first time.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils clearly enjoy being at school because teachers are dedicated to supporting and caring for them, and most lessons are engaging. As one pointed out, 'Teachers help you and they don't let bullying happen.' This is reflected in the good attendance and good behaviour seen. Lunchtimes and breaks are highly social occasions and pupils can often be seen helping each other with games or equipment. They show a sound understanding of, and respect towards, people different to themselves and know right from wrong. Pupils have a strong idea of how to lead safe and healthy lives. They try to choose a healthy diet and take part in the good amount of physical exercise, from football to swimming. The contribution pupils make towards the community is satisfactory. They take their responsibilities seriously, especially those in the school council and Eco committee, and many pupils help raise money for charity. The preparation of pupils for their future is inadequate because they do not all securely develop basic skills or develop sufficient teamwork and independent learning skills. The steps taken by senior leaders to address this are already showing improvements, especially in basic skills and with increased examples of children working together and independently.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching and learning are inadequate overall because a few lessons are not organised well enough to help pupils move forward. Sometimes, staff are unfamiliar with some of the learning difficulties pupils have. Sound teaching is secure for pupils aged five to seven, but in other age groups practice is not always adequate. The quality of teaching is improving as teachers can see the next steps in pupils' learning at a glance and are supported by good quality mentoring from senior staff. As a result, there is an increasing proportion of better teaching. Far more lessons are now planned to take account of recent learning, and pupils' books in English and mathematics contain details of what they have achieved and what they need to do next. Pupils are finding it motivating to have such clear personal targets. Pupils also appreciate the many imaginative activities provided, such as giving robots directions or taking away using the song 'Ten Green Bottles'. The work of teaching assistants contributes substantially to the progress being made in many lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has recently been developed to ensure that the personal and academic needs of all pupils are met sufficiently well. Activities have been designed to be more meaningful for those with severe and complex needs, those with autism and for the more able. Programmes of study for English mathematics and science are now planned effectively to secure progress for these different groups. The school provides a range of visits, visitors and projects to enrich pupils' learning, for example

some more able pupils join mainstream art lessons. Pupils are also beginning to have more opportunities to contribute and take on responsibilities and they are able to take part in sport and arts events for the school. These opportunities are currently satisfactory but, being newly established, lack a depth of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The school provides a caring and supporting environment where learners feel safe. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. Effective links with parents and professional agencies support the welfare of pupils well. Improvement to the way behaviour is managed has led to reduced incidents and calmer classes.

Until recently there was no system in place to measure and check on progress. This has now changed; all pupils have accurate assessment of their achievements, challenging subject targets have been set and the progress made towards achieving them is recorded and monitored. For most classes the new system is providing a better view of where pupils should be and is helping them catch up. However, this is not yet being applied consistently or effectively to secure adequate progress for a small minority. The school is working rapidly to address this shortcoming. Arrangements for when pupils leave the school are carefully managed but are limited in their effectiveness by a lack of information on achievements and attainment over time.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has addressed a number of serious issues in a remarkably short space of time, showing high quality leadership. The direction of the school, staff morale, teaching, assessment, the curriculum and the progress made by pupils have all been improved since September 2008. In particular, a system to provide leaders at all levels, including governors, with information by which to evaluate and manage the school has been developed. Staff now work as a team and are keen to get on with improving the school. It is, however, too early for the changes to have had a substantial impact on progress and achievement. Nevertheless, the capacity to improve leadership and management overall are now satisfactory. The local authority is providing significant support in order to secure lasting change. Senior staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and have accurately focused on the most important areas for further development. Challenging whole-school targets are now set, although it is too soon to gauge their effect.

A significant issue, with regard to leadership, concerns the skills of the few staff who have not been able to fully meet the highly specialised learning and behaviour needs of their pupils. Work to address this has already begun and teachers are beginning to develop more specialised skills as a result. This means, however, that equality of opportunity is currently unsatisfactory. Despite this, satisfactory steps are taken to make pupils aware of religious, social and cultural differences among people in the school, in their local community and throughout the world. With pupils having significantly different needs themselves and by being helped to play an increasing role in the community, the school recognises that there is greater understanding and tolerance by all involved.

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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
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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	4
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	4
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	4
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

¹ 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.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise Standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Annex B

22 January 2009

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Fort Royal, Worcester WR5 1DR**

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch, and seeing some of your lessons.

Your school has a friendly and caring atmosphere. Although many good things happen and you enjoy coming to school, we think that it is not yet good enough and needs to improve. Many of you make satisfactory progress in lessons and some of you make good progress, but for a small minority, teaching and the progress you make are not good enough and we have asked the school to do something about this. We want staff to make sure that they measure what you do in every class and use this information to help you make more progress in your work. We would also like to see them learn more about how to help you with the different difficulties you experience. You make steady progress in your social and personal skills, especially in your good behaviour and the care you show to one another. You have a satisfactory curriculum and your teachers see to it that you visit other places and meet people from different walks of life. The school is soundly managed, staff know how to improve things and for this reason, you are doing better in writing and communication, for example. Strong leadership from the acting headteacher has led to a lot of improvement recently which is beginning to benefit you in many ways.

Adults in the school keep you safe and look after you well. We were impressed with the way you take good care of each other and the environment. We are pleased that you take plenty of exercise and many of you try to eat a healthy diet. We would particularly like to see you carry on with the good work you all do through the school council, Eco committee and other projects to help the school develop further.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Potheary
Lead inspector