



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Park Lane Special School
Park Lane
Trecynon
Aberdare
CF44 8HN**

Date of inspection: October 2011

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Park Lane Special School, which is in a residential area of Aberdare, is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, multiple and complex learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. A few pupils have additional sensory impairments and communication difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN).

The school has 84 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 19 years. Pupils come from the whole of Rhondda Cynon Taff but predominantly from the Cynon Valley area.

There are two discrete autistic classes and one class for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

English is the predominant language of nearly all pupils. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. Two pupils are from minority ethnic groups and no pupils receive support for English as an additional language. There is one pupil with 'looked-after child' (LAC) status. Approximately 56% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is much higher than the all-Wales average of just under 20%.

The school has a hydrotherapy pool and a range of sensory rooms. The Foundation Phase has an outdoor learning environment. A major refurbishment of the existing buildings and the addition of newly built classrooms were completed immediately prior to the inspection.

The school provides a very broad curriculum and a high level of care in a safe, caring and stimulating environment.

The school was last inspected in October 2005.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Park Lane is a good school because:

- leaders and managers have high expectations and ensure that the school functions effectively;
- pupils achieve good standards in their learning and in key learning skills;
- levels of care and support are high and allow pupils to access learning effectively; and
- staff work well as a team and there is a positive environment for learning.

Prospects for improvement

The school has good prospects for improvement because:

- senior managers and the governors have a clear vision for the school which is shared by all staff;
- leadership is well distributed across the staff;
- the school manages its resources well and provides good value for money;
- staff work very effectively as a team and have high expectations of the pupils; and
- self-evaluation is well embedded and enables the school to identify clear and appropriate areas for improvement.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the school needs to:

- R1 improve the quality and frequency of information provided to parents and carers;
- R2 further develop the role of the governing body to ensure that it provides appropriate levels of challenge to the school;
- R3 ensure that all teaching reflects the best practice observed across the school;
and
- R4 widen the activities of the school council to include a greater involvement in school improvement.

What happens next?

Park Lane Special School will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Programmes of study are individually tailored for each pupil and it is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve with national averages or to analyse trends in overall performance over time.

All pupils make good progress in relation to their needs and abilities. Targets in individual education plans are clearly understood by most pupils, including those with additional learning needs. There is no significant difference between the progress of boys and girls or those who receive free school meals.

All pupils in key stage 4 and at post-16 gain a wide range of appropriate qualifications in accredited courses well matched to their abilities. Pupils gain valuable experience of the world of work which equips them well for the next stage in their lives.

All pupils behave very well, listen carefully and follow instructions. They respond well to questioning and reflect on how they are progressing. They take pride in their work and recall their previous learning.

More able pupils read aloud with confidence and use words and short sentences well to describe the activities that they are working on. They use literacy and numeracy skills effectively across all subjects and transfer these skills effectively from one learning situation to another.

Less able pupils develop the communication skills that they need to make choices and express their likes and dislikes. A few pupils use signing well and extend their responses without being prompted. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders make good progress in using Picture Exchange Communication System to help them understand what will happen next.

All pupils develop appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) skills in line with their abilities. They use different programmes to present work and know how to find information when researching different topics. Pupils in the Foundation Phase gain valuable experience in using simple programmes. They use digital cameras to make their own video clips and take pride in sharing these with others.

Most pupils develop their thinking skills well, in line with their ability and can apply skills in a relevant manner to everyday life. These pupils successfully gain the skills that they need to increase their independence, improve their work and contribute effectively to the wider life of the school.

All pupils make excellent progress in Welsh in relation to their needs and linguistic background. They understand Welsh adjectives that describe their progress and develop their speaking skills exceptionally well. Pupils, over time, build on a range of phrases and short sentences and extend their vocabulary. The quality of incidental Welsh spoken by pupils in classrooms and around the school is very good.

Wellbeing: Good

All pupils enjoy coming to school and they attend regularly unless they have periods of illness due to medical conditions. They feel that they are safe in school and have the support they need from all staff.

Almost all pupils understand the benefits of eating a healthy diet and enjoy practical cookery sessions. Opportunities to participate in physical exercise enable pupils to improve their social skills and to interact appropriately with peers and members of the wider community.

Pupils develop the skills that they need to get on well with others, and they are polite and considerate. They take care of equipment and help keep their classrooms tidy. They feel supported in making appropriate choices both in the curriculum and in other day to day activities.

Pupils know what to do and whom to talk to if they are upset.

All pupils behave very well. They understand what is expected of them and how to relate to others. Where pupils have challenging behaviour, staff help them to understand and manage their feelings and remain calm.

Pupils on the school council are developing their role in the life of the school. They meet regularly and discuss pupils' ideas for improving the school's work and its facilities. They gain a good understanding of how meetings are run. Pupils who are not elected to the school council are also given valuable opportunities to make their voices heard and contribute their ideas to the life of the school.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a range of stimulating learning experiences that cover all aspects of the curriculum. Staff collaborate on whole school topics to ensure coverage and progression from Foundation Phase to key stage 3.

At key stage 4 and post-16, pupils have access to a wide range of options that lead to formal accreditation and qualifications in ASDAN Awards and Agored Cymru modules through clear, individual learning pathways. All pupils have opportunities for work experience within the school and wider community.

The school provides a good range of extra-curricular experiences. Visits to local places of interest and pupil participation in local community events enhance their education.

The teaching of skills is given high priority within lesson planning. The school has developed a skills package which helps teachers plan for learning skills to be included in lesson planning. However, in a few lessons pupils are not given opportunities to develop these skills well enough.

Signing and picture exchange systems effectively support PMLD and ASD pupils in the development of their communication skills.

Recently purchased reading schemes are promoting the development of literacy skills in older pupils and the school is introducing an appropriate programme to raise standards in writing.

The school has achieved its second flag as an Eco-School. It succeeds in promoting education for sustainable development and global citizenship through activities such as recycling within school and the involvement of pupils in developing the school grounds.

Pupils across all key stages have excellent opportunities to develop and use their Welsh language skills. Pupils in key stages 4 and post-16 can study for accreditation in Welsh.

Staff and pupils use incidental Welsh accurately and naturally and Welsh is very prominent in displays. Welsh lessons offer stimulating and challenging experiences for pupils and also give opportunities for class teachers and support staff to gain knowledge and expertise in the field. Signing is used effectively in discrete Welsh lessons to support the learning of Welsh and they are also used well during follow up sessions led by class teachers.

Provision for the Welsh dimension, for example the annual eisteddfod and St David's Day celebrations, helps pupils to understand the cultural and historical context of Wales.

Teaching: Good

Almost all teachers plan effectively and offer a range of learning experiences to stimulate and challenge pupils to achieve. Creative multi-sensory approaches motivate and stimulate pupils with PMLD; appropriate and consistent structures for pupils with ASD enhance their access to learning. In the few lessons where teaching is less effective, lessons lack pace and differentiation and pupils are insufficiently challenged to enable them to make progress.

Most learning support assistants are effectively deployed in supporting learning, behaviour management and pupils' health and wellbeing. On a very few occasions, the high number of support staff inhibits the potential for pupils to develop more independent learning skills.

Assessment for learning strategies are not fully embedded across the school to enable pupils to know how well they are doing or how to improve. More able pupils are involved in setting their own learning targets; however, the school has identified a need to improve IEPs to make them accessible to all pupils.

A range of internal and external assessments are consistently carried out to inform planning to meet individual needs and to address whole school targets.

The school uses an appropriate range of assessment tools to track pupil progress and set useful targets for improvement.

The school meets statutory requirements for assessment, recording and reporting procedures; annual reviews are carried out for all pupils and where appropriate they also attend. However, a few parents feel that the school does not provide enough information to allow them to support their children's learning on a regular basis.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school provides a safe and caring environment for all pupils. The school nursing team develop and help implement comprehensive individual health care plans; they work alongside staff to deliver health, sex and relationships education and the OCN course in First Aid, and assist in the peer mentoring scheme.

An effective range of therapies such as hydrotherapy, massage, aromatherapy and music therapy support and complement physiotherapy and relaxation opportunities to promote pupils' health and wellbeing.

The school has achieved its fourth Healthy Schools Award. There is an effective food and fitness policy and a thriving food co-operative run by pupils. Exercise is successfully promoted through football and dance clubs and family swimming at the local pool.

All parents report that their children are happy to come to school where they have friends and feel part of the school community.

Effective behaviour management plans are in place for many pupils and behaviour is very good throughout the school. All staff have received training in safe pupil handling.

Members of the school council are confident in their desire to improve the school and its facilities and contribute well to school improvement.

Pupils' spiritual development is fostered appropriately through collective worship, times for reflection and religious education. Pupils care for each other well and develop their own class rules.

The accredited and innovative peer mentoring programme, developed jointly by the school and a local comprehensive school, has been very successful in raising pupils' self-esteem and encouraging respect for pupils in both schools. This initiative represents sector leading practice.

The school works very closely with agencies and specialist services such as Community Police and Fire Officers, therapists, specialist teachers and careers advisers to ensure that pupils and their parents receive high quality guidance and support for their education, wellbeing and post-school provision.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The school has a very positive and supportive ethos, which is promoted by all staff and the governing body.

It is an inclusive community, which ensures that all pupils have equal opportunities and can access all areas of school life.

The accommodation is of a high standard. Most of the school is new, with light spacious classrooms, and there are stimulating displays in appropriate areas which celebrate pupils' work.

The range and quality of learning resources is good, and supports as appropriate the pupils' learning needs and the requirements of the curriculum. Classrooms have a suitable range of ICT equipment.

The school makes very good use of the locality to reinforce life skills; pupils visit shops and learn to cross road carefully. Although recreational facilities are limited on the school site, good use is made of the adjacent park to provide good additional learning opportunities.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The headteacher and the senior management team have established a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all staff. They work well together to create a school ethos where staff, pupils and others who work in the school on a regular basis feel highly valued.

They have implemented comprehensive policies and plans which focus well on meeting the wide range of pupils' needs. The distributed leadership approach established in 2008 is beneficial in moving the school forward. All leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and focus appropriately on school improvement targets.

Senior leaders and middle leaders work well across the school to support and challenge colleagues. Teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for whole school leadership in curriculum areas and efficiently lead and support others.

The school meets both local and national priorities effectively. This includes the local authority's priorities for special schools, the School Effectiveness Framework agenda and the Unlocking Potential of Special Schools initiative.

The governing body shares the school's vision and is highly supportive of the school. It meets regularly and has appropriate sub-committees in place. Governors visit classes, observe activities and monitor the school's performance, but do not fully challenge and hold the school to account for the standards and quality it achieves.

Staff performance is regularly monitored, and evaluated through an inclusive performance management and appraisal system. All staff contribute effectively to school planning and improvement.

Leaders use the performance management and appraisal procedures well to identify whole school training and development needs for all staff. As a result, the school is able to meet the diverse and changing individual needs of the pupils. The training needs of new staff are quickly identified and they receive an appropriate induction programme.

Improving quality: Good

The school's management team takes responsibility for self-evaluation and uses a range of evidence as part of the well-established process. All staff contribute effectively to the process. The school seeks the views of parents and carers and an appropriate range of stakeholders. These views are valued and incorporated well into the self-evaluation report. A few sections of the report are not sufficiently concise and evaluative.

As a result of the self-evaluation processes, leaders know the strengths and areas for improvement well. The school has produced an appropriate school improvement plan linked to the self-evaluation report. However, the plan is not comprehensive and does not include short term targets that can be efficiently and effectively monitored and evaluated.

The school has effective systems in place for managing performance. There are appropriate procedures for regular classroom observation by the senior staff. Teachers are provided with written feedback, which includes areas for development. Outcomes from performance management are used well to identify further areas for development and training for school staff.

All staff have access to a wide range of appropriate courses, which impacts well on improving standards of groups of learners. Links between performance management, training and the school improvement plan are not fully developed.

The school has established effective networks of professional practice within the school and with other schools and partners. This is impacting positively on the outcomes for pupils.

The school is continuously developing and using a wide range of data to monitor the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils over time. This is used effectively to inform school improvement and improve pupil outcomes.

The school has made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the last inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The school works closely with an extensive range of partners. They have well established partnerships with the community, the local authority, parents and carers, Careers Wales and other special schools in the area.

They have good partnership arrangements with the local mainstream comprehensive school, which allows the schools to share planning and resources. Pupils from the mainstream school successfully access a good range of courses at Park Lane. They include horticulture and music. Pupils from key stage 4 and post-16 in Park Lane can choose to study design and technology alongside peers at the mainstream school.

The Welsh Government funding for 'Unlocking Potential of Special Schools' has been very effectively used to support an innovative shared peer mentoring initiative with the local comprehensive school.

All of these partnerships have a positive effect on the provision for pupils and the standards they achieve.

Links with local businesses and organisations in the community and a number of outside agencies ensure that pupils benefit from an extended range of valuable learning experiences and resources. This promotes well the pupils' social development and their understanding of the world of work.

Parents and carers are very appreciative of the support they receive from the school. However, a few parents would like to be informed about their children's progress more frequently so that they can support their learning more effectively.

Resource management: Good

The school has a good range of experienced, specialist teachers and other staff who are deployed appropriately to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Staff have appropriate planning, preparation and assessment time. This enables staff to be effective in ensuring that the pupils are provided with a wide variety of personal and learning experiences. High quality resources are available and used appropriately to match the interests and abilities of all pupils.

Areas of the school have been successfully designed to ensure that they are age appropriate for pupils across all the key stages.

The school's financial management is efficient and effective. In view of the good standards achieved by the pupils, the effective teaching and careful management of resources, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Programmes of study are individually tailored for each pupil and it is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve with national averages or to analyse trends in overall performance over time.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Parent questionnaire

Thirteen parents completed questionnaires and, overall, most are satisfied or very satisfied with the school and feel that it is well run. All of them strongly agree that their child likes school, feels safe there and was helped to settle in at the start. All parents feel that their children make good progress, that teaching is good and that staff expect the children to work hard. All parents agree that the school encourages children to take on responsibility, be healthy and take regular exercise. All parents agree that pupils behave well in school and almost three quarters strongly agree. A few parents do not feel that the school keeps them well enough informed about their child's progress.

Learner questionnaire

Sixty pupils responded to the questionnaire and, overall, are very positive about their school. Almost all pupils agree that they feel safe and are doing well in the school. Nearly all pupils feel that the school deals well with bullying and that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. All pupils agree that the school teaches them to be healthy. Most pupils feel that they have enough books and equipment and that children behave well so they can get their work done.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Mike Munting	Reporting Inspector
Meinir Rees	Team Inspector
Bernard Harrington	Lay Inspector
Julie Kay	Peer Inspector
Christine Rees	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11