



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
The Hollies Special School

Date of inspection: May 2013

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

The Hollies is a special school, maintained by Cardiff City Council. It provides day education for seventy-eight pupils aged three to 11 years. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. The majority of pupils who attend the school have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. A few pupils have additional difficulties relating to speech, language and communication. Thirteen per cent have physical difficulties and disabilities.

All pupils live in Cardiff. Currently there are 55 boys and 23 girls. Of these, 50% are from 17 ethnic backgrounds with 11 different home languages. Currently, no pupils are looked after by the local authority. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. Around a fifth of pupils receive free school meals. This is significantly lower than the all Wales average of 42.8% for special schools.

Pupils are taught in classes that are broadly determined by pupils' need, ability level and age. It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups over time because of the nature of the pupils' learning needs.

The school was last inspected in June 2007. The headteacher was appointed three years ago. There are two assistant headteachers. One has been in post for seven years and the other for 18 months.

The school, commissioned by the local authority, provides an outreach service to all schools in Cardiff. The Social Communication Interaction and Play service (SCIP) provides support, advice and guidance to mainstream schools on implementing appropriate strategies in working with pupils with autism in mainstream settings. This service is was not included in the inspection of The Hollies.

Summary

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

Current performance

The Hollies Special School is a good school because:

- pupils make good progress in relation to their needs and identified targets;
- pupils' skills, particularly their communication, are systematically developed throughout and beyond the school day;
- pupils participate well in all aspects of school life and clearly enjoy their learning;
- the school has very effective arrangements to support pupils' health and wellbeing; and
- the school works well with a wide range of specialist services to provide pupils with good quality care and guidance.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement at The Hollies Special School are good because:

- governors are suitably challenging and fully involved in the work of the school;
- there are clear links between the self-evaluation report and the good quality school improvement plan;
- the leadership team have been successful in securing improvements since the last inspection;
- there is strong parental engagement, including increasing targeted and specific work to engage parents of ethnic minority pupils; and
- the school places high importance on the continuing professional development of all staff.

Recommendations

- R1 Further develop the analysis of pupil standards across all aspects of the curriculum
- R2 Develop a system to ensure that all pupils can access feedback on their performance
- R3 Strengthen procedures for debriefing parents, staff and pupils following incidents of positive handling
- R4 Improve the monitoring of all subject areas
- R5 Work with the local authority and other partners to ensure that specialist services continue to provide input that is sufficient to the needs of pupils, as identified in their statement of special educational needs, or otherwise

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Pupils that attend the school have a range of autistic spectrum disorders and, as a result, the communication needs of pupils vary.

Over time, nearly all pupils make good progress in relation to their needs and abilities. They achieve the identified targets in their individual learning programmes.

Pupils' communication skills are developed throughout and beyond the school day in a communication rich environment.

Pupils use a range of methods to communicate, ranging from the use of visual objects to spoken language. A picture exchange communication system is used to very good effect by the majority of pupils. Many of the pupils who use this are able to communicate their needs and make choices, for example in selecting what to eat during breakfast club.

Generally, pupils are attentive in class and most are able to follow the instructions of staff. A few pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) to particularly good effect as a tool to help them communicate using voice and movement applications to develop visual tracking skills.

Across the school, pupils make good use of ICT to develop their skills. Pupils in the Foundation Phase, for example, are confident in using a range of ICT software programmes to support them in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.

Nearly all pupils are keen to work and contribute enthusiastically to lessons, work independently and stay on task. With time, they learn to follow clearly established procedures and routines, anticipate movement and use simple sequencing tasks well to assist in developing thinking skills. Many take part eagerly in songs, rhymes and other musical activities.

There is no significant pattern of difference between the progress of pupils receiving free school meals and their peers or other groups within the school.

Pupils who use spoken language are confident in sounding out letters, numbers and unfamiliar words. Pupils that are more able can read aloud and demonstrate an understanding of the text. They engage in meaningful conversation and a minority of pupils count and use simple Welsh phrases. A few use un-prompted greetings in Welsh.

Many pupils make good use of opportunities to engage in independent learning. For example, they effectively organise their own activities at their workstations.

Wellbeing: Excellent

All pupils feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves healthy. Where appropriate, they know about the importance of eating the right foods and taking regular exercise. All pupils engage well in lessons and are extremely proud of their work and achievements. Nearly all pupils attend school regularly and are generally very punctual in attending their lessons. The provision of therapies on site has made a major contribution to improving and sustaining high levels of attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school, they develop their social skills very well and make friends.

About a third of pupils attend an exciting and innovative after school club that successfully helps them improve their self-esteem. As a direct result, a few pupils have gained the confidence to move on to attending dance and tennis clubs in their community. This is excellent progress.

All pupils develop an increased understanding of themselves and their physical and emotional development. For example, girls take part in an extremely effective programme around preparing them for puberty. All pupils make significant progress in confidence when interacting with others. This has allowed pupils to successfully access essential services such as the dentist and hairdressers.

Due to the very carefully planned support, nearly all pupils behave well in and out of the classroom. Where pupils display challenging behaviour, they quickly gain control and get back on task, due partly to the timely help they receive from staff. Because of this, pupils make exceptional strides in terms of regulating their emotions and managing their behaviour.

Pupils have an effective voice in how the school is run and are fully involved in making decisions. For example, they have helped redesign the school hall and have chosen colours and styles of furniture and decorations.

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

The school provides a wide range of learning experiences that are appropriate to the needs of all pupils. The curriculum matches well pupils' needs, abilities and interests. The school places appropriate emphasis on developing all pupils' skills.

The delivery of key skills is very well organised. The provision for thinking skills is a very good feature and relates specifically to pupils' needs. The school arranges many useful practical activities that reinforce the acquisition of skills to support pupils in becoming independent learners.

There is a well-planned programme of personal social education, which makes a significant contribution towards improving pupils' social and life skills. This includes 'a girls group' that looks at issues around puberty and personal care. The school makes sure that it addresses the specific needs of individual pupils.

There is an excellent after school club for pupils from The Hollies and other settings. The club, run by a charitable organisation affiliated to the school, operates on five

days of the week. The club successfully extends pupils' learning and enhances their confidence, communication and self-esteem through play and a range of therapies. This is sector-leading practice.

The school effectively teaches pupils to use a range of appropriate communication techniques, such as signing and the use of visual strategies, augmentative and assistive communication approaches. Over time, these help pupils to overcome barriers to learning.

There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop and use the Welsh language. The school offers a wide range of activities to enable pupils to learn about and understand Welsh culture and heritage.

There is very good provision across the curriculum for pupils to learn about healthy living, sustainability and global citizenship. Pupils are fully involved and are active members of the Eco Crew. This group, amongst other things, monitors and ensures that lights are switched off in vacant rooms, windows are closed and computers and electrical items are turned off after use.

Teaching: Good

Teaching has many strengths and these are supported by a thorough understanding of pupils' learning needs and very good relationships between pupils and staff.

Teachers and teaching assistants effectively motivate and engage pupils. Planning is very detailed and teachers make good use of use a wide range of communication and ICT strategies to encourage learning. They work very closely together to plan for and provide learning experiences that are individual to pupils so that they can work to the best of their ability.

Transition throughout the day is seamless and managed very effectively.

Staff are very good behaviour and language models. They give very good encouragement in promoting interaction between pupils from all linguistic backgrounds. They make sure that all pupils remain on task. However, on occasion, staff complete tasks for pupils rather than waiting for them and giving them time to respond.

Teachers provide clear instructions in lessons and, when appropriate, make good use of visual symbols. This aids the understanding of pupils. Introductions to lessons are clear and appropriate to the level of pupils' understanding. There is good pace to lessons and effective use of praise. Teachers are skilful in their use of questioning to check understanding.

All staff manage behaviour very well. Where pupils do not behave well, staff help them to understand expected levels of behaviour and support them to develop more self-control.

The school has comprehensive systems for recording, tracking and analysing information about pupils' progress. This valuable information informs teachers' planning. Parents receive regular updates and are fully aware of their child's

progress. Individual educational plans are clear and contain measurable targets. However, pupils are not as fully involved as they could be in identifying their next step in learning.

Although teachers regularly mark pupils' work, they do not always make enough use of visual methods to provide pupils with feedback.

Care, support and guidance: Good

There are very effective arrangements to support pupils' health and wellbeing. The school provides a very caring and nurturing environment that encourages pupils to do their best and help each other.

The school is successful in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whole school and class-based assemblies, where children of all abilities take an active part, are used to good effect.

A wide range of specialist services provides pupils with good quality care and guidance. The school successfully provides support for all pupils in terms of speech and language and occupational therapies. However, the planning of these services is not fully integrated and support has reduced in frequency in the past two years.

The school pays very good attention to improving pupils' behaviour. In the few incidents of positive handling of pupils, the school keeps careful records. However, there is not always enough written information about what happens following an incident. For example, it is not recorded what steps are taken to inform parents, debrief staff and plan how to deal with behaviour in the future. In all other aspects, the school's safeguarding arrangements give no cause for concern.

The school has healthy school level 2 and has recently achieved a third eco-schools green flag. Across the curriculum, pupils learn the importance of healthy eating and exercise in ways in which they are able to understand.

The school has very good systems of care, support and guidance. There are a range of appropriate plans and policies that effectively meet the additional needs of all learners. This includes the school's ability to identify successfully any additional needs whilst pupils are attending the school.

Learning environment: Good

The Hollies is a calm, orderly and inclusive school. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum and this includes taking part in outdoor activity learning, and trips to places of cultural significance and local interest. It embraces the needs of all its pupils, irrespective of their background, and provides a warm, caring environment. Incidents of bullying or discrimination are very rare. The school has appropriate policies and procedures to ensure equality and avoid discrimination.

The school encourages pupils to recognise the differing needs of their peers.

The school building and outdoor space are maintained to a good standard. They are secure and used well to cater for pupils' educational needs. The school has taken care in ensuring that it provides a learning environment that is suited to the needs of all its pupils.

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

The headteacher has established a clear vision, which is shared across the school. There are comprehensive plans and policies in place. However, some policies, for example equal opportunities, are not specific enough to The Hollies. Staff have a very clear understanding of their particular roles and responsibilities.

Senior leaders work across the school to support and challenge colleagues and communicate high expectations to those they manage. They have created a school ethos where staff, pupils and others who work in the school feel valued. Staff reflect on their practice. All of the staff contribute to school planning and improvement.

Staff place appropriate emphasis on the development of pupils' skills and have recently made significant improvement to their delivery across the school. Monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in this area is rigorous. However, the school recognises the need to make sure that the monitoring of work in all subject areas is always of the same high standard. This is under review.

The governing body shares the school's vision, knows the school well and is supportive. It meets regularly and has had close involvement in the self-evaluation report and the school improvement plan. The governing body analyses school performance data. As a result, it challenges the school where necessary and focuses on school improvement.

Senior leaders use the performance management and appraisal procedures well to identify whole school training and development needs. As a result, the school is able to meet the individual needs of the pupils.

The school meets both local and national priorities effectively. This includes the School Effectiveness Framework agenda, the Foundation Phase, skills and the careful use of the pupil deprivation grant.

Improving quality: Good

Self-evaluation clearly informs the school's priorities for development. Work to improve quality is having a positive impact on the outcomes of pupils.

The self-evaluation report uses first hand evidence and clearly identifies areas for improvement but it is not always evaluative enough. The school seeks the views of a range of stakeholders, including parents and carers and governors, but does not make enough use of the views of its many partners within the community. However, senior leaders know the strengths of the school very well and the areas where

improvement is required. They have produced a detailed school improvement plan linked to the self-evaluation report that includes clear targets.

There is regular classroom observation by managers. This provides teachers with valuable written feedback and actions for improvements. Managers effectively identify where there is a need for staff to receive additional levels of support and take prompt action to ensure that appropriate strategies are in place.

The school has recently made significant progress in collecting an appropriate range of useful data to monitor effectively the progress of all individuals and groups of pupils. This data is used well to inform school improvement and improve pupil outcomes.

There is a strong culture of professional development and there are highly effective networks of professional practice within the school and with other schools and partners.

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

Partnership working: Excellent

The school works extensively with a wide range of very valuable partners in order to improve pupils' wellbeing. These include mainstream primary schools, specialist services, universities and the health service.

Parents and carers receive excellent support from the school. They value highly the workshops on issues that affect their lives such as how to improve communication with their child and sessions on how to promote sleep. This valuable work has a very significant impact on increasing parents' and carers' confidence in meeting their children's needs.

The Outreach service (SCIP) has created very strong links with mainstream colleagues in order to provide training, assess pupils and give guidance on planning work. In addition, they advise on practical behaviour management strategies for children with autistic spectrum disorders. There are very well developed plans to do more targeted and specific work to engage parents of pupils from ethnic backgrounds.

Health and education staff worked innovatively with the school to produce a high quality pack designed to make pupils more aware of their bodies. As a result, they can describe where they are hurting and feel less anxious about physical examinations. This work is sector leading and has been adopted by a number of special schools, doctors' surgeries and a care home.

The school has outstanding links with local banks and manufacturers and benefits from their support, for example through the provision of a Japanese garden, a karate exhibition and volunteers who help to improve the fabric of the school building.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources effectively. Resources are of good quality and are well matched to the interests and abilities of the pupils. Spending priorities and training programmes link closely with the school's improvement plan and are reviewed by the governing body, who in turn work closely with the school leaders and the local authority to ensure best value.

All staff are well qualified. Teaching and support staff are deployed well and make a very important contribution to the pupils' learning experiences and to the high quality of the care and guidance. Teachers receive appropriate planning, preparation and assessment time.

Staff attend a very wide range of appropriate courses. This makes a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing, behaviour and attainment of pupils. The school has been very successful at moving from a position of financial deficit to having a modest surplus. It achieved this through strict controls on expenditure without having a negative impact on the quality of education.

The school has identified a number of areas to improve the fabric of the building. This includes the refurbishment of some changing areas. Plans to address these are not as specific as they could be.

The school makes sure that pupils make good progress both in their standards and wellbeing. As such, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

All pupils feel safe in school and state that they are doing well. Nearly all pupils say that they know whom to go to if they need help with their work. Most pupils behave well in lessons and do not interfere with the learning of other pupils. Most pupils felt that the school managed bullying effectively and all agree that teachers help them learn.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twenty-eight responses were received. Of these, all parents either strongly agree or agree that their child is safe in school and likes attending. All report that their child settled in well when they first started at The Hollies and that they are making good progress. All parents either strongly agree, or agree, that staff expect their child to do their best.

A few parents did not feel that the school prepared their child well enough for moving onto the next phase of education after The Hollies.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Huw Davies	Reporting Inspector
Claire Yardley	Team Inspector
Alec Clark	Team Inspector
Andrew Brazier	Lay Inspector
Lisa Marshall	Peer Inspector
Dyfi Allen	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Year groups, the Foundation Phase 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 local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	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 Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, 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

Glossary of ALN terms

ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

ALN: additional learning needs

ASD: Autistic Spectrum Disorders, includes Asperger's Syndrome

ATR: additional teacher resource

BESD, ESBD or SEBD: Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties

CoP: Code of Practice

HI: hearing impairment

MSI: multi-sensory impairment

PMLD: profound and multiple learning difficulties

SpLD: specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia

VI: visual impairment