

**Pinewood School
Blackburn
West Lothian Council
10 June 2008**

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1. Background

Pinewood School was inspected in March 2008 as part of a national sample of provision for pupils with additional support needs. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and communication, and in mathematics and understanding and relating to the environment.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, and a group of parents¹ including representatives from the parent and staff association (PASTA).

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

Pinewood School is a special school for pupils aged between five and 18 who have a wide range of additional support needs including autism. The school serves the whole of West Lothian. At the time of the inspection the roll was 80. Seventeen pupils had a coordinated support plan. Due to the nature of pupils' additional support needs, all pupils were provided with free school meals. Taking account of their physical and medical conditions, pupils' overall attendance was good. The school had a number of changes in staffing in the term before the inspection. At the time of the inspection, promoted post holders were in an acting capacity.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The leavers' programme for senior pupils.
- The school's very positive links with parents.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils.
- Improving teamwork under the current school leadership.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, to all pupils in the secondary stages and to those in P4 to P7 in the primary stages, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents were very positive about the school. They felt that staff showed care and concern for their children. Parents were pleased with how the school provided their children with good learning experiences. A few would have liked better information about how to help their children with home learning activities. Parents felt that the school was well led and that they had better communication with the school now than in the past. Pupils enjoyed being at school and felt that teachers listened to them. A few felt that the school could deal better with disagreements between pupils. Staff enjoyed working in the school. They felt that communication throughout the school had improved since the start of this school session. A few support staff felt that they could be involved more in decision making. All staff thought that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Although there were a number of strengths in the curriculum, the overall quality was weak. It provided pupils with a broad range of experiences which made good use of facilities in the local area. The programme for the leavers' group provided relevant and enjoyable activities including work experience placements, college tasters and out of school learning which successfully encouraged senior pupils to develop life skills. Pupils in the leavers' group had opportunities to achieve a range of National Qualifications (NQ) units at Access levels 1 and 2. The school had recently made a positive start to introducing a subject based timetable for pupils at the secondary stages. However, the curriculum did not yet provide equity of experience for all. There were insufficient opportunities for all pupils to progress in their learning or to have appropriately varied experiences. The length of the school week at the secondary stages was shorter than that of mainstream schools. Although staff provided pupils with activities during the lunch break, they did not consistently monitor the effectiveness of these, particularly at the secondary stages. The school did not yet provide pupils with two hours of quality physical education each week. At all stages, the programmes for English language and communication and for understanding and relating to the environment were not sufficiently developed to ensure that pupils had a coherent experience and made progress in their learning. Teaching was variable throughout the school. Overall, strengths just outweighed weaknesses. In all classes, teachers had created positive relationships with pupils and encouraged them to learn. Most used clear explanations and made good use of questions to check pupils' understanding. However, they did not always share clearly what they expected pupils to learn and were inconsistent in their use of open questions to challenge pupils in their learning. In most lessons, teachers did not provide enough active learning opportunities which encouraged pupils to work independently. While most teachers made some use of information and communications technology (ICT) in their lessons, this did not always support pupils' learning.

Pupils enjoyed school and were motivated to learn. Most were well involved in their lessons and responded well to their teachers and to each other. They learned best when they had opportunities to be active in their lessons and where learning was presented in relevant contexts. For example, in science, senior pupils were well engaged when they learned about the properties of solids. Pupils in the leavers' group learned to grow and care for plants during their weekly visit to Oatridge College. At all stages, pupils had motivating learning experiences when they shopped for ingredients and used these to prepare food in home economics lessons. When activities were less active, the pace of learning was too slow, especially for more able pupils. Most pupils had developed little understanding of their strengths as learners and were not making as much progress in their learning as they could have.

The school provided a range of activities during the school day and at the after school club which gave pupils good opportunities to develop their wider achievements and personal and social skills. Staff made good attempts to develop pupils' active participation in the life of the school in a number of ways. For example, the pupil council developed citizenship skills as they made decisions which would improve aspects of the school. In lessons, teachers provided good opportunities for pupils to develop confidence as they gave their views and commented on their lessons. Across the school, pupils were becoming aware of environmental issues and the school had achieved a silver Eco-School Scotland award. The monthly community café provided opportunities for pupils to celebrate a range of events, including Scottish cultural events. Pupils were encouraged to develop enterprising skills and the school had achieved a gold award for enterprise. There were good opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills as they ate lunch in their class groups. Senior pupils were gaining in confidence as they attended the local college and participated in work experience placements.

English Language and communication

The quality of pupils' achievement in English language and communication was adequate. Most pupils were making good progress towards the language and communication targets within their individualised educational programmes (IEPs). However, these targets were not always sufficiently challenging or closely enough linked to individual progress. Most pupils at the secondary stages achieved success in a range of NQs at Access level 1 and 2. Most pupils listened carefully to instructions and listened and responded appropriately to other pupils. They were able to talk about themselves in groups and spoke with enthusiasm about the plot of a book they were reading. The school had made a start to developing the use of communication aids including signs to assist pupils to convey information for themselves, respond to questions and make choices. At the primary stages, pupils were developing reading skills using structured programmes. At the secondary stages, pupils took part in drama activities which reinforced their understanding of plot and character. At the secondary stages, progress in developing pupils' reading skills was not sustained. At all stages, pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to develop and reinforce their skills in writing in a systematic way.

Mathematics and understanding and relating to the environment

The quality of pupils' achievement in mathematics and understanding and relating to the environment was weak. Across the school, a few pupils were developing a sense of time and most used pictorial timetables to identify the main activities of the school day. A number of pupils at the primary stages had access to suitable activities in mathematics. For example, they gained a practical understanding of the links between money, shopping and cooking through visits to local supermarkets. Senior pupils developed their understanding of number in a range of ways which included the use of games. A few pupils at the senior stages undertook NQs at Access level 1 and 2. For example, pupils had achieved success in units on recognising time and handling money. Overall, pupils had not sufficiently developed their problem solving and information handling skills, particularly in real life situations. Throughout the school, a few pupils were able to use ICT effectively to support their learning. Pupils had too few opportunities to develop their senses through social subjects and play. Inadequate approaches to assessing pupils' progress and inappropriate targets made it difficult for teachers to evaluate pupils' achievements and ensure consistent challenge.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Overall, arrangements to meet pupils' learning needs were weak. Teachers, nursery nurses and classroom assistants worked hard to meet learning needs and provided effective support to individuals and groups of pupils. At times, they provided too much support to allow pupils to develop as independent learners. Class teams did not use a sufficiently wide range of approaches or activities to meet all the needs of individual pupils. At times, pupils were asked to complete the same task more than once, even when they had achieved it. Overall, pupils did not spend enough time in classes engaged in purposeful learning activities. All pupils had an individualised educational programme (IEP) with long- and short-term targets which were shared with parents and partner agencies. IEPs did not always contain appropriate learning targets. Staff had not made sufficient use of specialist training or support to meet the learning needs of pupils with communication difficulties or with autism spectrum disorders. They did not have a consistent approach when using alternative and augmentative forms of communication and prompted pupils too often. A number of staff required additional training in safely moving and handling pupils.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The school had effective approaches for care and welfare. All staff had developed very effective relationships with pupils and were aware of their emotional, physical, health and social needs. The school had very recently developed high quality pictorial resources to enable pupils to bring any concerns to the attention of staff. Arrangements for health and safety for activities and trips out of school and arrangements relating to pupils' intimate care needs were appropriate. At the start of the school day, pupils were expected to remain on school buses for too long. All staff had received appropriate training in child protection but they did not always fully record information about pupils. The school worked very effectively in partnership with health professionals to provide a high quality of health care for individuals. The school doctor and nurse provided very good advice and information for staff and parents. Therapists worked with class teams to put in place strategies to help pupils progress. The educational psychologist provided very sound advice to staff. However this was not always followed. Staff had improved aspects of school lunches while continuing to take account of pupils with specific dietary needs. However, health and wellbeing were not promoted consistently across the school. The transition of senior pupils to adult services was very well managed.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The management and use of resources and space for learning was adequate. The school buildings were well maintained and staff made good use of classroom space to display pupils' work. Classrooms were equipped with a good range of attractive teaching resources and all had modern ICT equipment including interactive white boards. There was an attractive sensory garden and outdoor play areas for pupils. Overall, the school had insufficient flexible space to meet the needs of learners and staff. Senior classrooms were located in prefabricated buildings outwith the main school building. Some classrooms were very small. The central open area was used as a dining room, a gym hall, for school assemblies and it also served as a teaching area for music. Occasionally when it was used as an area to provide pupils with physiotherapy it put pupils at risk of being treated with a lack of dignity. The building was accessible to users with limited mobility and there were appropriate security arrangements. The education authority had plans to improve the building and provide additional classrooms for the school.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	<p>Staff engaged well with each other and with pupils. Relationships were positive and most class teams worked well together. Improved approaches to communication in the school had helped to strengthen staff relationships. Staff treated pupils with respect and pupils responded by behaving well. Staff used praise well to motivate pupils. Their achievements and successes were effectively celebrated in class and at weekly school assemblies. Staff had high expectations for the development of pupils' social skills. They did not have sufficiently high expectations for pupils' progress in learning. Pupils learned about other cultures through the religious education programme and through assemblies and celebrations. At times these focused too much on poverty and did not provide a balanced view of diverse modern society. Some pupils did not have equality of access to the curriculum. This included pupils who needed specific technology in order to communicate not always having this available to them.</p>
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	<p>Staff had very successfully involved parents in the life of the school. They provided them with clear information about the work of the school through attractive newsletters and the helpful school handbook. Parents received information about their children's life at school through useful home-school diaries, regular parents' meetings, annual written reports and individual annual review meetings. The school actively promoted good attendance at parents' evenings and responded to parents' views about the timing of these. The PASTA group had been very supportive of the school and had successfully raised funds. The recently formed Parent Council, and the previous School Board, provided strong support for the school. Parents were consulted on sensitive health issues and the school nurse organised meetings for parents on sex education and puberty. The school had developed positive links with the community and made frequent use of the local facilities including the community centre, churches, the local sheltered housing complex and the <i>Chill Out Zone</i>, an activity centre for young people in Bathgate. There were positive curricular links with local primary and secondary schools and with West Lothian and Oatridge Colleges.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

Pinewood School provided pupils with a range of learning opportunities. Staff were committed to the school and had worked hard to provide a caring and supportive environment for learning. Despite some examples of strong teaching, overall, teaching approaches were inconsistent. There was a need to build on the best practice to improve teaching. Pupils had opportunities to develop their wider achievements and were developing a good range of life skills. There was scope for pupils to make more progress in their learning. Staff needed to have a stronger focus on developing a whole-school approach to meeting pupils' individual needs, which would underpin all aspects of its work and promote better learning.

The acting headteacher had been in post since the start of the school session. In her short time in post, she had made a very promising start to leading the school. She had developed positive relationships with staff, pupils and parents and had correctly identified the need to improve communication and teamwork throughout the school. Her improvements in these areas had motivated staff and encouraged them to participate more fully in decision making and the work and life of the school. In this way, staff were developing a positive approach to improving the school. The acting depute headteacher provided strong support to the acting headteacher. Together they had developed a vision for improving the work of the school and were working with staff, parents, pupils and other agencies to realise this. A number of improvements had been correctly identified, including the need for better progression in learning and increased opportunities for certification at the senior stages. At the time of the inspection, it was too soon to see the impact of these plans. Two acting principal teachers had been recently appointed. Their remits needed to be clarified to enable them to take a fuller part in school developments. The school's arrangements to improve its work through self-evaluation were adequate. The acting headteacher and depute headteacher monitored the work of the school in a range of ways. They evaluated teachers' plans, observed classroom practice and provided staff with helpful feedback on their work. They had recently engaged staff in new approaches to self-evaluation including peer valuation of planning documents. All staff now needed to implement quality assurance processes more systematically to ensure improvements in learning and teaching. With continued positive leadership from the senior management team, the school was well placed to improve.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to better meet pupils' learning needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve the curriculum at all stages and further improve arrangements for timetabling at the secondary stages;
- improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning;
- ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in their learning particularly in English language and communication and mathematics and understanding and relating to the environment;
- develop pupils' understanding of equality, fairness and diversity; and
- develop more effective approaches to self-evaluation to further improve the work of the school.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority to monitor progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in a report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Morag Gunion
HM Inspector

10 June 2008

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
The curriculum	weak
Teaching for effective learning	adequate
Learners' experiences	adequate
Improvements in performance: English Language and communication	adequate
Improvements in performance: Mathematics and understanding and relating to the environment	weak

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs	weak

How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	adequate
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	adequate
Equality and fairness	adequate
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	adequate
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	adequate
Improvement through self-evaluation	adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed school. • There was mutual respect between pupils and staff. • Their children were treated fairly. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents felt that they would like to learn more about how they could support their children with their homework. • A few parents were uncertain if they raised a concern that the school would do something about it.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils enjoyed being at school. • Teachers explained things clearly. • They felt that teachers told them when they had done something well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few felt that staff could be better at dealing with bullying. • A few felt that they did not get the right amount of homework.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff enjoyed working in the school. • They felt that pupils were enthusiastic about learning. • They felt that pupils' achievements were regularly celebrated. • They felt that the school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few staff felt that communication amongst staff could be improved. • A few staff felt that their training time could be used more effectively.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education and Cultural Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA or by telephoning 01506 600 200. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of provision for pupils with additional support needs, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEcomplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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