

WESC Foundation School

Topsham Road, Exeter , Devon, EX2 6HA

Inspection dates 15–16 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Learners at the school have a wide range of ability. From their individual starting points, a high proportion makes at least expected, and frequently better than expected, progress.
- Teachers are skilled at meeting the individual needs of learners. They record progress well and use the information to help learners make good progress and fulfil their potential.
- Every learner has a statement of special education needs. Great care is taken to ensure that the school delivers the specific provision that is set out in them.
- Behaviour is exemplary, both in school and around the whole site. Learners help and support each other. The staff's management of the potentially challenging behaviour of a significant group of learners is excellent, helping these learners to do their very best.
- Tremendous care is taken to ensure that learners are kept safe. This is reflected in the depth of planning that goes into ensuring that trips and visits are positive experiences that add a huge amount to the learning experience.
- The leadership of the school has a clear vision that covers the education of the school's own learners and also the effective use of the increasing expertise available to support outreach so that others can remain in mainstream schools.
- The leadership, including trustees, are committed to supporting the training of staff. Over time, the wider needs of learners have become more complex and this programme allows staff to develop expertise that sustains the effectiveness of provision for learners' specific needs.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Lesson planning for the learners who have profound and multiple learning difficulties does not always make it easy to identify and measure the 'small steps' of progress.
- Senior leaders do not yet undertake sufficient classroom observations to support rigorous checks on teaching skills and early identification of training needs.
- The composition and roles of the board of trustees do not yet enable it to be fully effective in supporting the school and in rigorously holding senior leaders to account for school improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Eight lessons were observed, all being joint observations with the principal or deputy principal.
- Meetings were held with the principal and deputy principal, staff with specific areas of responsibility and with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees.
- Although there were not enough responses to Ofsted's on-line Parent View survey to trigger an analysis of parent opinion, their views were gathered from recent questionnaires undertaken by the school.
- The views of staff were gathered from the staff questionnaire and from discussions held throughout the inspection.
- A meeting was held with representative learners, and as many learners as possible were spoken to during the inspection so that their views could be taken into account.
- Opportunities were taken to look at learners' work during lessons and a more detailed scrutiny of work undertaken by some students was made. Case studies were undertaken in order to evaluate the experiences of specific identified learners.
- A range of written evidence was taken into account, including information on the progress and achievement of learners, teachers' planning and assessment, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Grouccutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- In 2012 the school changed its name from The West of England School and College, and at the same time changed its age range to five to 16 years of age. It is part of the wider WESC Foundation, a charitable organisation which provides a range of services for people with little or no sight. It is administered by a board of trustees. The wider foundation also includes the provision of post-16 education and residential facilities based on the same campus as the school. These have both recently been inspected separately by Ofsted.
- While the remit of the school is to provide education for learners who have little or no sight, it is increasingly admitting those with a range of additional and complex needs. These include profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.
- As the severity of needs increase, the total number of learners in the school has fallen by about half since the last inspection as it adopts a more specialist role to meet increasingly complex needs.
- All learners have a statement of special educational needs.
- The additional government funding for specific groups, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority (known as the pupil premium), is, for a large majority of learners, subsumed within the general fees paid by local authorities for school places. However, the proportion who would qualify is above that usually found.
- Similarly, the additional government allocation for the promotion of sport and physical education in primary schools, and the Year 7 catch-up funding to support progress in literacy and numeracy, are subsumed within the general fees paid by local authorities.
- The large majority of learners are from White British backgrounds and none are at the stage of learning English as an additional language.
- Learners come from across the south of England and have been placed by 26 local authorities.
- A new deputy headteacher and a new Chair of Trustees were both appointed shortly before the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase progress for all pupils by ensuring that lesson planning for learners who have profound and multiple learning difficulties is simplified and makes clear:
 - the specific focus of all activities undertaken during the day
 - how the activities will promote progress in a specific area, such as gaining independence skills, making choices and developing communication.
- Increase the rigour of checks made on teaching and early identification of training needs by planning for senior leaders to undertake more direct observations in classrooms.
- Ensure that the board of trustees is fully able to support, as well as challenge, the school leadership to make further improvements by:
 - ensuring there is the full complement of members
 - allocating specific responsibilities to members and so increase their accountability.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- There is a wide range of ability, the only common factor being that all learners have a visual impairment. While some have profound and multiple learning difficulties, others follow courses leading to GCSE.
- Increasingly, learners have a range of additional and often profound learning difficulties. Some learners have syndromes which have a profound impact on learning and physical development, of which sight is only one element.
- Needs are met effectively, and the percentage of learners who make better than expected progress, including progress in English and mathematics, is high throughout the school.
- The progress of learners is recorded termly. Annual individual targets are set using national benchmarking tools to ensure that these targets will encourage learners to do their best.
- For those whose needs are more severe, staff moderate learners' progress with colleagues in a school that has similar learners. This gives confidence that the tracking of skills, such as those to promote independence, choice making and communication, are accurate. That said, planning and recording of progress are done using the same format as that used for all other learners. These basic skills are not always planned for and recorded in a way that allows maximum progress to be made.
- Care is taken to track the progress of identified groups of pupils. These groups might reflect wider learning difficulties such as profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. It might reflect social groupings, such as boys and girls. There is no significant difference in the performance of identified groups, all make good progress.
- Progress in different subjects is also monitored carefully. Learners make good progress from their starting points in reading and writing (with around 10% of the total able to develop their skills in braille), communication and mathematics. Progress is best in science, where learners say they very much enjoy the practical aspects of the subject.
- The progress of those who would be eligible for the pupil premium is monitored even though the school does not receive specific funding in most cases. In English and mathematics, learners who would qualify make good progress from individual starting points, similar to their peers.
- There is also a good support for physical achievement. This is promoted well in various ways, such as visits to Riding for the Disabled or good use of the school's full-sized swimming pool.
- Some pupils are jointly educated in association with a mainstream school. Where this happens there is careful liaison to ensure that needs are met and progress is fully supported in both settings.
- The majority of students move to the WESC College provision after Year 11. This is on the same site and learners are well prepared for the transition.

The quality of teaching is good

- Throughout the school good, sometimes outstanding, teaching supports good progress by learners. This is reinforced by the ability of teachers to gain specific qualifications in visual impairment as part of their ongoing training.
- Teachers know their learners and their capabilities well because good quality information is gathered. This starts with a very detailed profile when they first join the school and continues with the careful tracking of progress throughout the school.
- Detailed lesson planning shows how individual needs will be met. It promotes good progress, and outlines help when this is not as good as anticipated. However, when it comes to planning for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the format used does not so easily identify the 'small step' gains in specific areas that are being sought. So, opportunities to maximise progress could be lost.

- The individualised approach supports the most able as well as those with more severe disabilities and special educational needs. It promotes effective teaching in English, communication and mathematics and reflects the strong promotion of equality of opportunity throughout the school.
- Teachers have high expectations and generally work effectively with their learning support assistants in strong classroom teams. Very occasionally, learning support assistants are too directly involved with individual learners, which can limit the development of independence skills.
- Teachers are confident in using a range of technology and specialist equipment to support effective learning. For example, the good use of switches encourages those with the most challenging difficulties to make choices and engage in learning. Recently, the school has invested in hand-held computers. Learners with sufficient vision use these to record and analyse their learning in lessons, helping them reflect on their achievements.
- Teachers and learning support assistants often show good skills in effective questioning. This not only provides confirmation that learners have understood a topic it also promotes good discussions that help them develop their understanding further.
- Learners' work is checked regularly. Teachers use a range of ways in which they feed this back. For those with very little or no sight it would normally be verbal feedback, but for those with more vision it is sometimes written. Learners like the way that feedback is positive and not only praises good work but, where appropriate, suggests ways in which it could be made even better so they can improve their learning.
- The effective use of other professionals based at the school reinforces and supports learning. For example, a speech therapist was observed working alongside the class team to develop communication skills in a class for learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The use of the expertise available to support outreach work has increased considerably. The school is planning to develop this further. It is already working with a range of partners, including local authorities, schools and parent groups. There is a commitment to supporting the education of visually impaired children and young people in mainstream settings wherever this would not be to the detriment of learning.
- The wider WESC Foundation is seeking to develop its national and international profile, developing expertise particularly in the neurological aspects of visual impairment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of learners is outstanding. Some can display very challenging behaviour as a result of wider difficulties. Over time they learn to moderate this, supported by the school's detailed behaviour policy and consistent and effective behaviour management.
- As a result, no time is lost to learning and learners demonstrate great enthusiasm for study. They get on extremely well, respecting and supporting each other. There are strong relationships with staff, who are very effective role models. There is a clear mutual respect throughout the school.
- The development of effective social skills, such as collaborating, sharing and respecting the views of others, is a reflection of the highly effective promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It also reflects the extent to which the school goes to try to prevent discriminatory practice.
- Behaviour is not just of such a high standard in lessons. Throughout the day, and in all settings, it is the same positive picture. At lunchtime, for example, learners enjoy each other's company and there is a happy buzz in the dining area and in the social areas around the school site. Learners enjoy taking additional responsibilities. The role of the school council is important and provides a forum where the views of learners can be represented and taken into account.
- Attendance is below average because of recurrent illnesses suffered by some learners that are part of their wider difficulties. When they are well the attendance of learners is excellent because they enjoy being at school and with their friends so much.
- Learners insist that because they get on so well together bullying is not an issue. They are, however, very well aware of bullying in its different forms because it is covered in personal,

social and health education lessons, with a particular focus during Bullying Awareness Week.

- Work is also done in computer studies lessons on ensuring that learners have a clear understanding of the dangers of cyber bullying and the misuse of social networking sites.
- The school's work to keep learners safe and secure is outstanding, a view shared by parents and learners. Many opportunities are taken to widen learners' experiences and learning through a variety of trips and visits. Risk assessments are detailed and effective, covering not only the physical situations but also the risks inherent for each individual in undertaking an activity.
- Learners are extremely well supported in living their lives as fully as possible while remaining safe. Learners are encouraged to develop rich and fulfilled lives in which boundaries to accessibility are removed wherever possible.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal, her recently appointed deputy and the trustees of the foundation are focused on the creation of a successful school that demonstrates effective practice in the field of visual impairment.
- Subject leaders and other middle leaders have clear job descriptions and accountability for their specific areas. Senior leaders have adopted a more strategic role to move the school forward.
- Staff are valued and supported, responding positively. They are encouraged to develop and share expertise in the field of visual impairment. This is supporting plans to develop and promote effective outreach services.
- Teachers are employed on the same terms and conditions as those in mainstream schools. They understand the links between performance and pay, measured against progress towards meeting agreed annual objectives. A similar scheme exists for care staff.
- Staff value the support for training that is also part of the appraisal process, supporting school improvement and making them accountable.
- The school evaluates itself very well. This enables it to draw up clear and measurable areas for development and improvement.
- Strong links exist with parents and support groups who work in the field of visual impairment. Parents are partners in the education of their children and supported very effectively.
- Similarly, there are strong and effective links with a range of professionals. The foundation employs a range of therapists to work directly with learners and there is excellent liaison with medical and social care staff so that a common approach to meeting needs has developed.
- This is equally true of the safeguarding arrangements that are in place and meet requirements. It is also reflected in the intimate care planning for those learners who have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Leadership is not yet outstanding because there is insufficient monitoring of classroom practice. This limits the robustness of appraisal and management of teachers' performance. It could mean that the need for additional professional support might not be picked up quickly enough.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Trustees, under the direction of the recently appointed Chair, have identified the need to increase their accountability and better challenge senior leaders. However, there is a range of valuable expertise and good practice. Trustees with an education background monitor the impact of teaching and learning, visiting classrooms and meeting key staff. Those with financial expertise monitor spending, ensuring that the focus of the school's budget is effective education. Challenging annual performance objectives are set for the principal. Trustees have a good overview of the process of staff appraisal and how this links to pay. They are aware of the process for dealing with inadequate teaching. A specific trustee is responsible for monitoring safeguarding. This ensures that requirements are met fully and detailed training is in place for all staff. All statutory responsibilities for school governance are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	113652
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	439477

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Appropriate authority	The Board of Trustees
Chair	Richard Purchase
Principal	Tracy de Bernhardt-Dunkin
Date of previous school inspection	March 2011
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