

Talbot Specialist School

Lees Hall Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S8 9JP

Inspection dates

28–29 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders, including governors, have developed a strong vision for the future, which is shared by staff. They have worked effectively together to ensure that overall, the quality of teaching is good across the school.
- Senior leaders play a pivotal role in delivering special educational needs services within the local authority and have in the past directly supported another school.
- Governors have been very effective in helping the school move forward. Their regular visits and close involvement in developing school policy enable them to offer expert support and challenge to school leaders.
- Staff understand the needs of their pupils well. Teachers and teaching assistants are adept at supporting pupils' needs. This enables pupils to make good or better progress and achieve well over time.
- The cheerful and happy way in which pupils greet staff at the start of the school day clearly demonstrates pupils' enjoyment of school.
- Disadvantaged pupils make equally good progress as others in the school due to the carefully targeted support they receive.
- Pupils are polite, empathetic and caring. They show helpful attitudes towards each other as well as to staff and visitors. Most are very enthusiastic when visiting the canteen, shared by the adjacent secondary school, queuing politely and patiently to be served.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well both inside and outside the classroom. They remain interested and engaged even when waiting to take turns in lessons.
- Students who attend the school's post-16 provision make good progress due to the relevant curriculum, which closely matches their needs.
- Staff use alternative forms of communication, such as signing, well to enable pupils to communicate fluently and effectively. Staff also use symbols to support pupils' development of reading and writing skills. However, sometimes there is an over-reliance on the use of symbols which slows the most able pupils from developing their writing skills.
- The role that middle leaders play in supporting senior leaders to bring about improvement is at an early stage of development. School leaders are aware of this and have taken steps to bring about improvement. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these changes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the most able pupils are given regular opportunities to practise their writing skills
 - adults reduce their use of symbols to support the most able pupils in their writing.
- Increase the monitoring role of middle leaders, so that they are focused on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in their subject areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive headteacher, head of school and other senior leaders have a clear vision for the school. Their expertise, coupled with the effective support that leading a teaching school alliance gives them, have enabled them to support other schools within the local authority.
- The work with other schools has contributed to leaders' outward-facing approach to all that they do. For example, in line with recommendations from the Rochford Review, the school has developed effective partnerships with other schools locally and nationally to develop further systems to assess pupils' progress.
- Robust performance management systems are in place that enable senior leaders to evaluate accurately the performance of staff across the school. Challenging targets are set for all staff that are closely linked to the national standards, as well as targets from the school development plan.
- The well-balanced curriculum is carefully matched to pupils' needs, skills and abilities. This enables them to make the best progress possible at their own pace. For example, Pathway 1 enables pupils to develop non-verbal communication through the use of signs and symbols as well as to have access to the curriculum by using their senses such as touch, taste and smell. Pathway 3 meets the needs of most-able pupils and focuses on developing pupils' academic and self-help skills with the clear goal of preparing pupils to attend college or the world of work.
- Pupils enjoy many interesting extra-curricular activities ranging from horse riding to local and national theatrical and musical events. These, combined with Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions and residential trips, support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- However, the requirements of the curriculum are not always carefully followed through in the classroom. For example, work in the books of the most able pupils, particularly in English, does not give pupils sufficient opportunity to practise the writing skills of which they are capable and this slows progress over time for a small group of pupils.
- While school leaders have started to implement a new system for measuring pupils' progress and achievement, they recognise that more work is needed to fully embed the system, in order that they can more effectively measure the small steps of progress pupils make.

Governance of the school

- Governors are enthusiastic and proud about the school and its pupils. They are knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve, and play a strategic role in planning for the future.
- They visit the school often to see the work of the school at first hand, so that they can hold leaders to account, particularly around funding and health and safety issues.

- Governors provide effective support to the executive headteacher, particularly with her work in supporting other schools in the local authority.
- The governing body effectively manages the extra funding the school receives for disadvantaged and Year 7 pupils. This is clearly evidenced through analysis of school data, which shows that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress as others from their starting points. However, governors are aware that they need to look more closely at some areas of spending, in order to be clear on the impact of spending over time.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding pupils is a key priority for all members of staff who work in the school. Regular training sessions ensure that staff are fully aware of current legislation and are clear about what to do for a child in need.
- Senior leaders who lead safeguarding work effectively with external agencies, often taking the lead. They regularly attend meetings relating to safeguarding and are very clear about their responsibilities.
- Staff know pupils well. They have an intuitive understanding of pupils' usual patterns of behaviour. This enables them to act very quickly should they pick up any changes that might signify distress, unhappiness or abuse.
- New staff spoken to during the inspection said that they felt safeguarding had been a key focus in the work they had undertaken during their induction period. They believed this had prepared them well for working in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and support staff work very effectively together in order to meet the diverse needs of pupils in the school. Planning for learning in most classrooms is thorough and meets the needs of individual pupils.
- The close relationships forged between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Pupils' pleasure and smiles at seeing staff at the start of the school day evidence this well.
- Challenging targets are set for all groups of pupils, which are carefully matched to their levels of need. These are used effectively to evaluate progress made by pupils across the school.
- When learning is at its best, teachers are innovative and bold. For example, through the medium of Shakespeare or Sherlock Holmes, pupils of all abilities learn well through touching, feeling and discussion. Support staff are integral to supporting pupils to feel and experience, for example, the sweet flavour of strawberries on their tongue and shaving foam between their fingers.
- When learning is less strong, pupils spend too long waiting patiently to experience learning or to make a response. This restricts learning time and slows progress overall.

- Pupils have access to a range of different learning experiences which reflect their needs well. However, the most able pupils do not always get enough opportunities to develop their writing skills. For example, sometimes pupils are repeatedly asked to write over letters written by staff rather than being given the opportunity to make an attempt to practise writing them on their own.
- Staff use praise effectively to guide and encourage pupils to try even harder and this encourages pupils to do their best in most lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Developing pupils' academic and personal development is a key focus for the school. Adults effectively plan activities that focus on what pupils can do rather than what they cannot achieve, which raises pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
- Pupils spoken to throughout the inspection were confident and very clear about their thoughts and ideas. For example, the outdoor play areas are in their opinion in need of some improvement. Pupils' clear plan for improvement, although difficult to achieve currently due to constraints on the building, demonstrated the careful thought that had gone into their 'makeover' plan.
- Pupils told the inspection team that they were proud to be members of the school and felt their views were listened to. The vast majority clearly enjoyed visiting the school cafeteria at break- and lunchtime and meeting with pupils from the co-located secondary school.
- Pupils are clear that they feel safe and secure in school. Older pupils commented how interesting life-skills classes taught them how to travel safely to and from school. Younger pupils also described how school helped them to learn how to stay safe when outside school, for example when going horse riding.
- 'I love coming to school to see my friends,' and 'I learn when I come to school,' were typical comments made by younger pupils. This demonstrated well their high levels of enjoyment and the increase in social skills and personal development that pupils gain when they attend school.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection and those that responded through the online survey, Parent View, also agreed that the school provides a happy and secure environment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Despite the very high level of need of some pupils who attend the school, the number of incidents of difficult behaviour has decreased significantly over the last year.
- Pupils almost universally show excellent attitudes to learning in classrooms. The vast majority try their best to succeed at the tasks set.

- Very good manners prevail, particularly in the cafeteria and the corridors. Pupils are lively, friendly and curious and are keen to let visitors know how well they are doing at school.
- School leaders have worked exceptionally well to successfully reduce unauthorised absence in particular groups. A decrease in the unauthorised absence levels of one particular group of pupils has boosted the school's attendance rates to close to the national average for secondary schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good or better progress from generally low starting points. In 2016, pupils successfully achieved a broad range of qualifications and accreditations in line with their level of need and ability. Evidence seen in pupils' books and in other recorded formats demonstrates this well.
- Targets set for pupils are often required to be holistic and are closely focused on the ability and aptitude of the individual pupil. Staff set work at the correct level, based on pupils' skills and interests. For example, pupils were observed studying 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' in one classroom through the medium of objects and sounds pertinent to the characters in the story. This skilful delivery of English enabled pupils to make good progress both academically, socially and emotionally.
- The most able pupils make good progress in developing reading skills and pupils spoken to say that they enjoy reading books from the small library area outside classrooms. Other, less able pupils were observed listening attentively to stories, evidencing their burgeoning enjoyment of reading.
- Pupils' timetables closely match their needs. They access a wide range of subjects, including science, humanities, art and food technology. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and clearly demonstrates their good progress across the curriculum.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similarly good progress to other pupils because their individual needs are recognised and appropriate extra support is provided. This has removed any differences in achievement between this group and that of others in the school.
- In 2016, almost all Year 11 and Year 14 students went on to either further education or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leadership of the school's post-16 provision is good. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for post-16 students works closely other school leaders to ensure that sixth-form students receive the same good quality of learning and closely focused curriculum as others in the main school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall, because staff are very clear about the needs of all students. Students undertake visits to a wide variety of settings, including colleges, and are offered a good range of opportunities to follow their interests, for example in playing squash and preparing meals for the group. This enables them to make good progress academically and in developing independent life skills.
- Students' behaviour is excellent and many show mature, courteous and polite attitudes both inside and outside school.
- Students follow a programme that is tailored to their needs and builds on their previous achievements in the school. The practically based personal development curriculum is carefully planned and leads to a work-related qualification and the Duke of Edinburgh Award for citizenship. In addition, students for the first time have also achieved qualifications in science and physical education.
- The large number of pupils who attended school last year and who remain engaged in their current placement is strong evidence of how well prepared pupils were at the end of their school career for the transition to the next phase in their lives.

School details

Unique reference number	107178
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	10003532

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	164
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marion Hutchinson
Executive Headteacher	Judith Smith
Telephone number	01142 507394
Website	www.talbotlearningcommunity.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@talbot.sheffield.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school caters for secondary-aged pupils who have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. Many also have associated physical and medical needs.
- All pupil who attend have an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs.

- The school shares its site with Newfield Secondary School. Both schools share a cafeteria and dining area.
- The school does not make use of off-site training.
- The executive headteacher is a national leader of education. The school holds teaching school status. Senior leaders work closely with the local authority, supporting schools across the authority in developing provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in classrooms across the school with senior leaders.
- Inspectors also analysed a range of school documents, including safeguarding documentation, pupil progress data and the school's curriculum planning.
- Meetings were held with pupils, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff governors and the local authority.
- Informal meetings were held with a small number of parents at the start of the day and the inspection team took into account the feedback of 17 parents given via Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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