

Hamilton School

Hamilton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B21 8AH

Inspection dates

10–11 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Hamilton School is an extraordinarily happy and calm place. From very low starting points and sometimes difficult previous experiences, pupils make exceptional strides in their learning and in their personal development.
- Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding. The headteacher, his senior and middle leaders, including governors, responded very quickly to the previous inspection findings. They have worked tirelessly to bring about rapid improvements in the progress which pupils make so that it is now outstanding.
- Highly effective teamwork across the school is very apparent. Every member of staff, including specialist practitioners, teaching assistants and other support staff, share a total commitment to providing pupils with the best education possible.
- Staff go to a great deal of time and effort to provide pupils with visual materials that help them to understand their work or to make choices, for example, at lunchtimes.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers use assessment information exceptionally well. They ensure that work in all subjects is extremely well adapted so that individual pupils can make the best possible progress they are capable of.
- In a secure and caring environment, pupils develop excellent attitudes to their learning. They feel happy, safe and well cared for, and their anxieties are reduced so they can learn well.
- Pupils make great strides in their personal and social development. They enjoy coming to school and attendance levels are high.
- Behaviour is consistently and effectively well managed so that pupils quickly learn how to manage their own behaviour. Learning and leisure times are pleasurable for all.
- Parents are full of praise for the school and the support it provides to them and their families.
- Children who start school in early years get off to an excellent start. There is an outstanding balance of activities which children can explore for themselves and tasks which adults lead to help children make sense of their world and begin to communicate their needs and wishes.
- Members of the governing body share the senior leaders' ambition and vision for the school. They make an outstanding contribution towards Hamilton's development as an outstanding school for pupils with autism. They have a very clear view of the day-to-day purpose and practice in the school to provide highly effective challenge.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine and embed the assessment process for subjects other than English and mathematics which the school has begun to develop
 - to be sure that leaders have a clear view about learning in all subjects
 - so that leaders and managers can easily identify any areas for further development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- There is a strong culture of excellence in the school. Senior leaders, including governors, are passionate about securing continuous improvement to provide the best possible education they can to meet the needs of pupils with autism spectrum conditions. Staff at all levels are rightly proud to work at the school and of the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection. The shared ambition, clear identity and stable staffing, created by the excellent headteacher, make it an exciting place to work.
- Senior leaders have introduced a thorough assessment process which provides clear information about how well pupils are making progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and work has begun to extend this process to all subjects of the curriculum. Leaders attend regular planning and review meetings in each class so that they, and governors, have a very clear picture of the progress of individual pupils, of different groups of pupils and their achievement in different subjects, so that they can give advice and guidance to quickly deal with any area of underperformance.
- The information provided through the excellent assessment data clearly shows that pupil premium funding is spent highly effectively, not least to buy in occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. These specialists work alongside class teams to ensure that pupils are able to learn effectively. As a result, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils is as equally outstanding as that of others. Attention is also paid to the progress of most-able pupils to ensure that targets are suitably challenging so that these pupils achieve as well as they possibly can. The very small minority of girls also achieve equally well because of the close attention to their individual needs.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are given every encouragement to improve their practice with pupils with autism. There is an excellent performance management programme linked to the teachers' standards. School leaders have invested heavily in developing middle leaders to take on their roles and responsibilities, which they do with great enthusiasm. They provide staff with opportunities and support to gain qualifications with five members of staff currently undertaking higher-level qualifications in the field of autism spectrum conditions.
- A great deal of time and thought has been given to providing an appropriate curriculum and it is constantly under review to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of pupils. Pupils practise reading, writing and mathematics in all subjects so that, as far as possible, they can use these skills in their everyday lives. The school has sought specialist expertise to improve subjects such as science, music and physical education where they had identified a lack of expertise, and these subjects have now improved. Very close attention is paid to ensuring that visual materials and other forms of communication, such as information technology, support pupils' communication and help them to understand the routine of their day at all times. Pupils enjoy the extra-curricular clubs at lunchtimes, such as the 'Thomas' club, art club and girls' club, and enjoy the new or renovated outdoor areas. The school's individualised approach ensures that every pupil has an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Staff go to great lengths to try and ensure that pupils are prepared as well as possible for their future lives in modern Britain, and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through all aspects of the curriculum as far as possible, particularly through the very focused personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons.
- The school has thought carefully about how it uses its primary physical education and sports premium. The funding has enabled pupils to access sports sessions, such as a climbing wall, gymnastics and increased swimming sessions. The school is developing work with specialist coaches to improve the skills of staff in delivering physical education and enabling pupils to compete with others, for example, via the work of the Albion Foundation.
- Partnerships with parents are wholly supportive and provide parents with high-quality information about what their children are learning. The pastoral support manager and other members of staff respond quickly to parents' requests for help and advice. Parents spoke very warmly about the family-friendly workshops, the open door for guidance from members of the leadership team, specialist support staff, class teachers and key workers which help them to manage their children at home. They particularly value the activity clubs which the school organises for the school holidays and at weekends.
- The school is rightly proud of its website which is very user friendly, provides a wealth of statutory and other useful information, and guides parents towards other sources of advice.

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has developed strong links with other schools and external partners to share best practice and ensure that his school is continually improving. Links with other agencies are often led by Hamilton School staff to make sure that its pupils are safe, and to support their personal well-being and that of their families.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the governing body involve themselves in finding out about the work of the school at first hand through their links with classes. Following a self-audit, they have ensured that they have an excellent spread of expertise including in the field of autism spectrum conditions. They monitor all aspects of the school's performance keenly and are well informed to be able to question the headteacher about pupils' achievement and the performance management of teaching and learning. They maintain thorough checks to ensure that pay progression matches the impact of teaching.
 - Governors agree areas of growth, including the increase in pupil numbers since the previous inspection and the new building work being undertaken to accommodate them. They monitor finances, including those which support staff professional development and the use of additional funding, to ensure that it is having a positive impact and there are no gaps in achievement between different groups.
 - Governors ensure that their statutory responsibilities, such as safeguarding, are carried out robustly, but they are also very supportive of the aspirations of the headteacher to develop and improve the school further.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has stringent policies and procedures; all staff are familiar with them and follow them extremely effectively. The school's designated lead is highly proactive in ensuring that other agencies are involved as appropriate, where necessary doggedly pursuing them to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching across the school is of a consistently high standard which supports the excellent progress pupils make in lessons and over time.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced a revised assessment system which enables class teams to work together to keep an ongoing record of the progress of individual pupils in each lesson. Teachers are then able to plan highly effectively their next steps in a personalised way that ensures that each pupil makes the best possible progress they can.
- Teachers have a very clear understanding of the need to consolidate learning for these pupils by repeating skills which they may already have learned in different situations. Sometimes work is planned so that pupils can enjoy and repeat success with familiar work before they face the challenge of the next step. This helps them to feel confident and remain on task to try something new, and reduces anxieties which might result in behaviour which could disrupt learning.
- Work which teachers provide in each lesson is organised to meet a wide range of ability within classes. In several lessons seen, most-able pupils were expected to write a sentence about what they had learned while others filled in gaps in sentences from a word bank and others organised a story using photographs or symbols.
- In lessons in all subjects, teachers pay attention to developing pupils' literacy and mathematical skills in a way that will help them in real life: for example, by understanding first, next and last when ordering items to make Christmas wreaths.
- The shared in-depth knowledge of each pupil enables the highly skilled teaching assistants to work extremely effectively. They provide as much support as necessary while encouraging pupils to work as independently as possible.
- Where pupils fail to make the progress expected of them, teachers are quick to seek guidance, advice and help to improve their own practice and put in place interventions to raise the pupils' achievement.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are extraordinarily resourceful in making visual aids. Many pupils are non-verbal and rely on the consistent use of visual materials to support their learning. Teachers will often plan a wide range of visual tools to help each pupil understand what is expected of them. In addition to visual symbols and photographs, teachers make extensive use of information and communication technology to help pupils access information and record their work.

- Useful feedback is given to pupils as they are engaged in tasks so that they can clearly relate the feedback to the work they are doing, and understand how to improve their work and what their next steps will be.
- Teachers demonstrate a good understanding of pupils' behaviour for learning and adapt their classrooms and their teaching to ensure that pupils can access learning as efficiently as possible. For example, in one lesson seen, a pupil carried out some work, then had a bounce on the trampette before carrying on with his work, and this repeated cycle was well understood to enable him to complete his tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils develop trust and respect for staff and each other because of the high-quality care and guidance they receive. Pupils and their parents say they feel very safe in school.
- Staff work closely with parents and other agencies to deal with problems and ensure pupils' safety and well-being through a shared approach.
- As far as it is possible, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. Staff have a very good understanding of their pupils' vulnerability and help them to understand the dangers of the internet or of doing something wrong or dangerous, often through the use of social stories and other visual materials.
- Pupils develop an understanding of relationships in a positive way. For instance, they learn about bullying by practising good friendships and relationships. Staff know that pupils with autism may not find it easy to express their worries or understand emotions. They know their pupils well and watch for signs that may indicate a pupil is unsettled or anxious, and they work hard to develop the communication skills they need to talk about and acknowledge their feelings.
- Pupils clearly enjoy lessons and work hard in them but they also enjoy the more difficult unstructured play times when they love to let off steam on bikes, the play equipment, playing football or simply running about.
- As their personal skills progress, pupils build their confidence and resilience and are increasingly willing to try things which they may find more difficult.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Strong relationships between pupils and staff support pupils to learn to manage their anxieties and related behaviours because all staff follow the behaviour policy and procedures consistently. As a result, lesson times are purposeful and pupils concentrate extremely well on their work.
- Behaviour support plans are referred to and followed by all staff working with a pupil who needs one, so that learning is not disrupted for them or for others in the class.
- Attendance levels are good because pupils love to come to school. There have been no exclusions since the previous inspection, which is an indicator that the school is managing pupils' special educational needs extremely well.

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress, often from low or very low starting points, as a result of the outstanding teaching. High proportions of pupils exceed their targets although the very large majority are unable to reach the national expectations for pupils of their age due to their special educational needs.
- After arrival at the school, many pupils make a slow start as they adjust to the demands of their lessons and develop the communication skills they need to understand the world of school. However, as they settle and make sense of their environment, and because their special educational needs are so well understood, learning rapidly accelerates and by the end of Key Stage 1 and into Key Stage 2 progress from their various starting points is outstanding.

- Following the introduction of the revised assessment system, the school is able to clearly understand the progress of individuals and groups in reading, writing and mathematics. Detailed assessments are being extended to other subjects in the curriculum. Data show that language-based aspects of these subjects, such as using and applying mathematical skills, comprehending what they are reading, and writing about what they are learning, are more difficult for these pupils. As a result, teachers take effective action to find ways to support pupils to develop in these areas.
- The school has introduced a phonics scheme since the previous inspection to help pupils understand the sounds which letters make. This is beginning to show a positive impact on more-able pupils' accuracy of reading and on their writing. Staff are modifying and developing the phonics scheme so that more pupils are able to access it, and they have embedded an early literacy programme which is helping pupils understand what they are reading about. In a Key Stage 1 English lesson, pupils thoroughly enjoyed taking turns at reading *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* and were able to answer questions about what they had read through well-structured and personalised follow-up work. The most-able pupils achieved challenging targets and clearly enjoyed their successes.
- The regular planning and learning review meetings and frequent classroom team meetings quickly identify pupils who are underperforming against their targets so that interventions are speedily put in place to support them to move forward.
- The development of good, usable communication underpins all learning in the school. The majority of pupils are non-verbal when they enter the school. Teachers and support staff are innovative in the resources they produce and, as a result, pupils begin to be able to make sense of their learning and express themselves more effectively.
- The high proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieve just as well as others in the school through the close attention teachers pay to assessing and planning next steps for each individual pupil and to the effective use of the pupil premium. The funding of specialist staff such as occupational and speech and language therapists makes a huge contribution to helping pupils access and get over barriers to their learning.
- Similarly, the very large majority of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage and who may have English as an additional language, and the small number of girls, perform equally as well as others through the individualised approach.
- The support pupils receive for their academic and personal development ensures that they are as well prepared as possible for the next stage of their education. The move to their next school when they leave Hamilton is managed in detail to avoid disruption and to share knowledge and understanding of each individual pupil's needs.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children enter Reception class with levels of development which are usually well below those of their peers, particularly in their social and communication development.
- Outstanding leadership and management of the early years ensures that no time is lost in producing and implementing individual learning plans based on very careful assessment of the children in the first few weeks after they arrive. As a result, outcomes by the time they move into Key Stage 1 are outstanding.
- Children settle quickly and begin to flourish in a well-organised environment with outstanding support from highly skilled and dedicated staff.
- The outdoor learning and indoor learning environments provide opportunities for children to explore carefully thought out resources. Staff are very skilled at prompting children to investigate meaningfully and develop language skills, while giving them the freedom to find out things for themselves.
- Children thoroughly enjoy the adult-led activities such as making mince pies. The multisensory experience enables them to touch, taste, smell and feel the ingredients and to experience the wonder of putting them together.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in early years are outstanding. Individual plans and whole-group sessions focus on developing children's early learning skills, in particular their social and communication skills, in planned snack sessions or on computer activities, for example. The teacher and teaching assistants assess children's progress through all activities and have very high expectations for what they can achieve, ensuring that they begin to develop their early skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Children's personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Staff are vigilant in ensuring children's safety and well-being to support them to develop good behaviour and social skills. They have the firm foundations they need for good and outstanding learning when they move into Key Stage 1.

School details

Unique reference number	103600
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10002519

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Collins
Headteacher	Jon Harris
Telephone number	0121 464 1676
Website	www.hamilton.bham.sch.co.uk
Email address	mailto:jharris@hamilton.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 October 2013

Information about this school

- Hamilton School provides for pupils with autism spectrum conditions, most of whom have additional barriers to their learning. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, care and health plan.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased significantly since the previous inspection and is due to increase further to 110 pupils in 2016. Building work is currently being carried out to provide additional accommodation.
- The very large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds with pupils of African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin comprising the largest groups. A high proportion, over half of pupils, have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is about twice the national average. This is additional government funding for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school has developed several outdoor areas in the last two years, including an accessible outdoor area for children in the early years, a climbing wall and sunken trampoline which are timetabled for use with named pupils, raised beds in a garden area and a park with large play equipment.
- The school provides an after-school club on two days a week and at weekends through an independent provider, and holiday activities with other providers. Lunchtime clubs are provided by school staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the chair and other representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and external specialist professionals.
- Inspectors also held meetings with senior and middle leaders, and talked informally to other staff and to pupils.
- They heard a small number of pupils read and looked at examples of their work in books and files.
- Inspectors took account of 18 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and also reviewed the responses in the school's own most recent parent survey.
- Additionally, inspectors considered the responses of a range of staff in the 48 questionnaire returns.
- Various school documents were scrutinised including data and other information about pupils' progress, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, and documents relating to attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

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