

Twelve outstanding special schools

Excelling through inclusion





This report was produced by Ofsted with Dr Peter Matthews, consultant and former Her Majesty's Inspector.

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Contents

Foreword	2	Sharing excellence	43
Summary	3	System leadership	44
Outstanding special schools and pupil referral units	5	Building capacity	44
Selecting the schools	6	Sharing expertise	45
Unearthing the secrets of success	7	Curriculum innovation	47
Achieving excellence	9	Providing training	48
Turning a school around	10	Leading and brokering alliances to support children and families	49
A challenge for all schools	11	Leading a partnership of schools	49
Raising standards, skills and self-esteem	13	Taking responsibility for improvement of another school	50
A focus on learning and teaching	16	Into the future	51
Staff recruitment and development	18	Pictures of success: the outstanding schools	53
A bespoke curriculum	21	Ash Field School, Leicester City	54
Assessment and tracking	22	Cuckmere House School, East Sussex	55
Visionary and determined leadership	23	Dacorum Education Support Centre, Hertfordshire	56
Building on excellence	26	Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Camden	57
Sustaining excellence	27	Glyne Gap School, East Sussex	58
The challenge	28	James Brindley School, Birmingham	59
Teamwork	29	Linden Bridge School, Surrey	60
Engaging pupils	30	Linden Lodge School, Wandsworth	61
Developing independence	32	Piper Hill High School, Manchester	62
Working with parents	35	Ravenscliffe High School, Calderdale	63
Linking with mainstream provision	37	Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service, Shropshire	64
Preparing for transition	39	Woodlands School, Blackpool	65
Pushing the limits	40	Further information	67

Foreword

This is a review of 12 outstanding special schools, most of which have excelled at what they do for many years.

The schools provide for very vulnerable children and young people, either because they have complex special educational needs or because they are sick or have been excluded from full-time mainstream education. Many of the students also have unique abilities and talents. The schools in this survey are all highly successful at promoting learning. Special schools form part of the continuum of provision for education, and this document focuses on the secrets of their success.

Twelve outstanding special schools is the third in a trilogy of reports on outstanding schools in challenging circumstances. But the circumstances of these schools are rather different from those of mainstream schools; they are more directly about the very particular needs of the individual child or young person than the characteristics of the community the school serves. These schools are educational innovators. They have staff who are exceptionally skilled both as educators and as carers, and who have a passion for their work and a deep affection and respect for the children they teach. The teachers and support staff have a range of communication skills which enable them to connect with their students. Many teachers have a refined ability to recognise needs and responses which may be far from evident, enhanced teaching skills, and the expertise to recognise progress which may proceed in tiny increments. Some are required to have the experience, knowledge and versatility to provide, as part of a staff team, for all the main components of the 3 to 19 mainstream curriculum.

One principle stands out. Those who work in these schools aim *never to give up on a child*. They have the highest aspirations for them and expect these children and young people to learn, achieve and succeed in different ways. In such a positive environment, the children and young people respond unusually well. This report illustrates many cases of young people who, from small beginnings or from schooling that was interrupted by obstacles and traumatic events, have gone on to achieve remarkable things. They demonstrate their school's success in improving their life chances, despite their circumstances.

What these schools can do, others can. This document presents a challenge for special and hospital schools and pupil referral units which are not yet outstanding. Mainstream schools also have much to learn from some of the approaches described here.



Christine Gilbert
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Summary

This report shows what a sample of the most effective maintained special schools in England do for pupils with substantial special educational needs. The report is written, in a sense, by the 12 schools for other schools. It describes and interprets what highly effective providers give as the reasons for their success.

Children and young people can experience a spectrum of difficulties which make it hard for them to make progress in a mainstream maintained school.

The schools in this study provide for a spectrum of needs. The range of maintained school provision is supplemented by independent or charitable schools, albeit with publicly funded places. These schools are not included here, nor are units attached to mainstream schools. The report does, however, include hospital schools and pupil referral units, because they cater for particular educational needs, even though the children and young people they provide for do not necessarily have statements of special educational needs.

All the schools featured here are outstanding and most have a record of sustained excellence. They are among the most effective in the country in their particular specialisms. Brief portraits of the 12 outstanding schools can be found at the end of the report. These are intended to represent the character of the schools, a little of their history and some striking features. They do not supplant the most recent inspection reports on the schools, which are available on Ofsted's website.¹

There are many ways in which the outstanding special and related schools exhibit educational practice at its best. These include:

- high expectations and aspirations and a profound and well-justified belief that every child and young person can learn and achieve
- refined skill in finding and applying the most effective approaches to communicating with, relating to and teaching children and young people with special needs and challenges
- exceptional expertise in assessing progress and recognising the smallest steps as well as large jumps in learning, and in using assessment to guide teaching directly
- highly effective and indispensable teamwork across the school workforce in which varied skills combine and best practice is readily shared
- strong partnerships with other professionals and providers, not least in reintegration and transition
- the provision of ambitious and exciting opportunities through well-designed and individualised curriculum arrangements
- respect for individual children, young people and their parents, with the power to bring cheer and self-belief to children, and relief, optimism and support to parents
- unremittingly committed, inspirational and forward-looking leadership which believes that every professional challenge has a solution.

This document illustrates such practice and qualities through examples drawn selectively from the 12 schools in the sample, although it can be said with confidence that all are reflected in each of the 12. It identifies some core ingredients of *achieving, sustaining and sharing excellence*.

¹ www.ofsted.gov.uk

How to use this report

This report is intended as a discussion document for leaders in all special schools, other providers and mainstream schools with pupils and students who have special educational needs or who, for a number of reasons, experience barriers to their learning.

About four out of five special schools are now at least good. For these many good schools, some of which already have outstanding features, the aim must be to enable every pupil to succeed, to the greatest extent possible. Schools which do this comprehensively are outstanding schools. The obstacles on such a journey are not insuperable for good schools. Those who work in such schools now will identify with many of the approaches featured in this document.

This document is also meant to challenge those who are not in good schools to improve them urgently. This document should be used by leaders in these schools to analyse what makes the difference between their school and those described here. Is it, for example:

- that expectations are not high enough?
- a matter of being more consistent?
- that there is a need for more rigorous tracking of progress and the injection of timely support?
- that teaching is not yet consistently good or learning sufficiently effective?

- that the school has not asked pupils how it could do a better job for them?
- that the school has limited aspirations for its children and young people and needs an injection of ambitious leadership?

The challenge for school leaders, and not just leaders of special schools, is not only to be curious about the schools featured here, but also to give their own practice and approaches more critical analysis, perhaps starting with the questions above. The text might be considered in sections, through a structured approach, perhaps as themes for leadership team meetings. New members of staff could be asked to audit the school in terms of this report. It could be reproduced for governors and key staff and the elements used to guide the school's improvement programme. Schools are challenged to use the document in whichever way will have the greatest effect, but at least to do something with it. It may also be of interest to parents and carers.

If the reader's school is outstanding, the text will hold few surprises. It celebrates the work of other excellent schools. The challenge for outstanding schools is how to sustain their excellence and improve further. There may be ideas here that will help.

Outstanding special schools and pupil referral units



Outstanding special schools and pupil referral units

Viewed as a group, the majority of special schools and pupil referral units do a good job. The special schools provide for pupils with substantial or profound and often multiple needs, or pupils having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

1 Many of the less effective providers are schools for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.² The challenge of providing for such pupils, particularly those who become excluded from mainstream schools, is also reflected in the low proportion (7%) of pupil referral units inspected in 2007/08 that were outstanding, less than half the proportion of all types of school (15%). Nevertheless, nearly two thirds of pupil referral units were found to be at least good.

2 Educational provision for children with medical needs is very varied in scale and scope, but is an important and challenging part of alternative provision. Challenges arise not only because of the nature of the physical and mental health of the children and their locations and circumstances – which include home care, hospital wards and secure units – but also because their educational needs can span the whole range and demands of the mainstream curriculum. This report includes two such providers, both outstanding: one is the largest hospital school in the country, covering 14 sites, and the other is a part of Shropshire’s multi-dimensional alternative provision.

Selecting the schools

3 By July 2008, 85 special schools had been judged outstanding or equivalent on two or more of their most recent Ofsted inspections.³ Two of the 85 schools, Woodlands School in Blackpool and Linden Bridge School in Surrey, both of which are included here, have been judged outstanding or equivalent in all four of their Ofsted inspections. Fourteen schools had received three outstanding reports.

4 All the schools in the sample were judged outstanding in their last inspection in their overall quality, leadership and management, teaching and learning, and inclusion. All had at least two outstanding inspection reports or had made consistent and sustained improvement to become outstanding from a low base. From a long list which met these criteria, HMI⁴ specialists in Ofsted nominated a small sample of maintained special schools and alternative providers for this survey, taking account of the requirement to cover:

- a range of needs
- a range of ages: three to 19 years
- examples of boarding provision
- a significant commitment to outreach work
- different sizes of school.

5 The resulting list is not exclusive. It represents some of the most effective schools of their type in England, but by no means all of them. It covers a representative range of special educational needs and includes outstanding educational provision for children with medical needs and pupils referred from mainstream schools. The schools are therefore what researchers would call a purposive sample.

² *The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2007/08*, TSO, 2008; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Publications/annualreport0708>

³ ‘Outstanding’ includes ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ in earlier inspection cycles.

⁴ Her Majesty’s Inspector.

6 The 12 exceptionally successful special and hospital schools and pupil referral units featured in this report are listed below. They are described in more detail in the final section of this publication.

Ash Field School, Leicester City

Cuckmere House School, East Sussex

Dacorum Education Support Centre, Hertfordshire

Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Camden

Glyne Gap School, East Sussex

James Brindley School, Birmingham

Linden Bridge School, Surrey

Linden Lodge School, Wandsworth

Piper Hill High School, Manchester

Ravenscliffe High School, Calderdale

Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service, Shropshire

Woodlands School, Blackpool

9 There was much in common in what the schools chose to describe or display. This invariably included the history, vision and ethos of the school and its approach to its mission. There was a shared focus on learning, the importance of recruiting and developing the right staff and the need for trust and teamwork. In these schools, the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are a refined science, the results being fed back into strategies for outstanding teaching. These core processes were set within a rich range of curricular opportunities which took account of and often surpassed those in mainstream schools. No school was an island: each was engaged in a range of partnerships aimed at providing for the current and future needs of the children and young people.

10 In all the visits, the importance of leadership shone through, particularly the example and vision of the headteacher. These school leaders set the highest standards for themselves and their schools and made a major contribution to the outstanding provision for pupils and their parents.

11 The focus of this document is on the success of these 12 schools in enabling every pupil to succeed to the greatest extent possible. Access to learning and establishing degrees of independence and self-determination are crucial to this success.

Unearthing the secrets of success

7 The Ofsted inspection reports for these outstanding schools are publicly available.⁵ The schools tend to know their strengths and weaknesses better than even well-informed visitors and are therefore well placed to identify the most important ingredients of their success.

8 Each of the schools was visited for a day by an HMI who followed a programme arranged by the school. The schools chose their own ways of communicating how they had become excellent, what they were doing to sustain excellence, and how they were making what they had learnt available to other schools, particularly less effective schools. They provided evidence through a range of witnesses including education, support and therapeutic staff, pupils, parents, governors and other professional staff.

⁵ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports>

Outstanding special schools and pupil referral units continued

Three facets of inclusion

12 Inclusion has many forms but one principle, the right of a person to have the same opportunities and respect as anyone else. Three examples of inclusion, drawn from one of the schools, set the scene.⁶

■ **Responding to need.** Pupils admitted to Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, which provides for the primary age range, increasingly have additional needs. Regular professional development days and weekly staff meetings provide training for all staff based on the needs of the pupils in the school and emerging priorities. A recent example of this is the admission of a wheelchair user into the school. The school responded quickly and effectively to install a ramp and adapt toilets appropriately. Additional staff training was provided, in manual handling, feeding, and understanding how cerebral palsy affects a young person. Finally, to ensure access to the curriculum the timetable was arranged so that all of the child's lessons took place in wheelchair accessible areas of the school. This preserved as much independence as possible. These arrangements were completed within a term to ensure the pupil's early entry into the school.

■ **Providing opportunity and support.** One girl has been with the school since she was two. Her parents had used signing with her from birth. She now attends a mainstream school once a week. She has a cochlear implant – and she attends the mainstream school partly to encourage her speech and friendships as well as to provide peer competition. Her parents were conscious that she was very capable and that she would benefit from mainstream input. She now has a wider peer group of pupils at a similar academic level and a local social life. She can access the teacher through the use of a teaching assistant from Frank Barnes. She now copes very well with the social situations in the mainstream school and is developing her sense of independence. Frank Barnes is working with the parents and the mainstream school to arrange all the resources and staff training, including Deaf awareness training, to support her transition to a full-time placement in the future.⁷ Her parents are very supportive and are keen that she is able to maintain her Deaf identity within the mainstream school.

■ **A sense of identity.** A 'deaf studies' curriculum has been developed by the deaf studies group hosted by Frank Barnes School and is also now being used nationally in deaf schools and units. The curriculum is divided into five areas related to what it means to be deaf: identity, culture, communication, technology and history. It was decided that these were aspects of deafness that would not normally be encountered by deaf children during the course of their lives, so they would need explicit teaching. The school maintains that children who follow this curriculum leave school with a strong deaf identity and a sense of who they are, why they are deaf and the impact that this has on their families and their lives. It also helps them to understand how they see themselves, their families and the wider world. The course also looks at deafness in the context of minority ethnic communities. Since becoming available in March 2009, the course has been adopted by 25 schools, services and support services, nationally and internationally.

13 Maximising individual achievement is central to the purpose of Frank Barnes as well as all the other schools. The end of Key Stage 2 test results in 2008 show that of the three Year 6 pupils entered, all achieved Level 5 in science. Two reached Level 5 in mathematics with the third at Level 4. All achieved Level 3 in English. In 2009, two boys who have a range of additional needs including dyspraxia, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and English as an additional language, provisionally achieved Level 3s in mathematics and Level 4s in science but were not entered for English.

14 Inclusion is the common thread woven into this narrative. It shows in the exceptional efforts made to help children and young people rise above their difficulties through highly skilled teaching, therapy and care. It features in the wide opportunities provided to work with or rejoin mainstream schooling and, for those who do not, engagement in a rich and positive range of experiences in and beyond their school and home communities. The next section turns to some of the schools which make such excellent provision and considers how they have become outstanding. The report is illustrated by case studies of individual children and young people attending these schools.

⁶ 'Inclusion' is the successful education of all students (whether with or without disabilities, disadvantages, etc.), while celebrating the resulting diversity, including various abilities and cultures. It is about the quality of a child's experience and providing access to a high quality education which enables them to make progress in their learning and participate fully in the activities of their school and community.

⁷ Capitalisation of the word 'Deaf' is used as a convention when a person identifies as a member of the Deaf community and is often a British Sign Language user. Lower case 'deaf' refers to the medical definition but doesn't necessarily refer to Deaf culture.

Achieving excellence

Achieving excellence

Almost all the schools in this group have excelled for many years. But for the few that have made the journey from an Ofsted category of concern to near the peak of success the principles are little different from those that apply in mainstream schools.

Turning a school around

15 Linden Lodge is a school for children and young people whose primary challenge is visual impairment. The principal arrived at the school immediately before a school inspection in 1997, when the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. At that time the school's roll was 58 and falling. According to the principal, the budget was 'unsustainable', the building was 'appalling' and the local authority had concerns about the school's viability. When inspected next in 2001, the school was judged to be effective and providing good value for money. The school was judged outstanding at its most recent inspection in May 2007 and was granted specialist status (physical and sensory) in September 2009. The school attributes its transformation to five levers of change.

- **Clarity of purpose.** A clear vision is communicated to all staff, pupils, parents and other stakeholders. This centres on the expectation that pupils with visual impairment should receive the best possible education. Enacting this aim has required leadership to be consistent and persistent in raising expectations and improving standards. The headteacher is recognised as taking an interest in all aspects of the school's work and having a 'can do' attitude which sets high expectations for both staff and pupils with a disability.
- **Quality and attitudes of staff.** To improve performance, staff needed to accept change. The school roll was falling due to more capable pupils with sight problems being included in mainstream schools and units. Staff had to rise to the challenge of teaching pupils with more complex needs. Several

changes in staffing followed the arrival of the new principal. Desired qualities in new staff were: a positive attitude towards pupils with a disability; commitment to learning new skills; and the ability to work in a team. A powerful programme of staff training and professional development was instigated to raise the knowledge and capability of staff. The result is that teaching and learning are outstanding. The low incidence of pupils' visual impairment makes professional development doubly important because there are few teachers available for recruitment who have the requisite skills. Unashamedly, the principal's recruitment policy includes 'a fair bit of talent spotting' and encouraging staff who have potential to join the school.

- **Distributed leadership.** A new senior leadership team was formed which has complementary skills. The principal sets the tone and motivates staff with his passion and conviction; the vice-principal ensures the curriculum is delivered effectively; while the head of administration ensures resources are properly managed and fund-raising is successful. Staff feel that the different skills within the senior leadership team are a strength. They also say that leaders have a shared and consistent approach and lead by example.
- **Multi-disciplinary staff synergy.** The relationship between care, education and therapy staff has been transformed. All have been given equal importance; they work closely as a team to look at the individual needs of each pupil. Staff refer to the strength of this holistic approach, where, for example, a teacher, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, school nurse and care staff might work together to devise a programme for a pupil. Care, therapy and education staff meet together to review pupils' targets.
- **Infrastructure.** Improving the school's accommodation and resources was vital to improve the learning opportunities of pupils and raise the morale of staff and pupils. The site has been refurbished and extended to include excellent facilities including a multi-sensory room, visual enhancement room, hydrotherapy room, gym and sensory garden. Lifts, ramps, guide rails and sensory trails promote mobility and access.

16 The principal is also realistic about the pace of change. He refers to the school embarking on a journey which is still continuing. There is no complacency, even now that the school is outstanding. Teaching, which was 'good with some excellent features' in 2001, had become outstanding by 2007: 'Meticulous planning for learning coupled with carefully integrated classroom therapy enables pupils to make the best possible progress.' The school also sees the involvement of parents as integral to success. These aspects are reflected in the following example.

Professionals and parents in partnership at Linden Lodge

One child has been in the school since reception. When she started at Linden Lodge she displayed challenging and uncooperative behaviour, which included dropping to the floor, and repetitive and attention-seeking behaviours. The school's approach involved two key strategies:

- to improve communication by enabling her to understand what others were expecting
- to ensure consistency between home and school.

A baseline assessment was completed and targets for improvement set. Therapists were fully involved in the programme, which included issues relating to eating and use of the toilet. The girl was given a timetable, with tasks broken into very small steps and supported by objects of reference. The plan was regularly reviewed and progress discussed with the girl's parents, often on the telephone. Some basic Makaton signs were used initially although the use of these has been reviewed and reduced as the girl has become more verbal. Parents and the grandmother were invited to the school to observe her behaviour. A video was made of how her behaviour was managed at school and given to her parents. As a result similar strategies have been adopted at home. She has made considerable progress and is now beginning to access Braille.

A challenge for all schools

17 There is significant challenge when trying to meet the needs of pupils whose behaviour makes them chronically hard to teach. Ensuring effective provision gives rise to the debate about how to establish adequate control within a caring environment and avoid exclusions.⁸

18 The challenge of including rather than excluding pupils requires positive and thoughtful action, which starts with mainstream provision but is inescapable in special schools and pupil referral units. Turning a blind eye leaves staff and other pupils to cope with behaviours which may be repetitively disruptive or erosive and which can, at worst, erupt into unprovoked violence, sometimes symptomatic of extreme frustration, disorientation or fear. Internal exclusion, ranging from time out to significant time spent in a nurture group, inclusion unit or other haven, is one solution; school transfer is another. The fair access protocols in each local authority allow for pupils perceived as hard to teach, who end up being excluded, to be distributed among schools. The problem may be solved by passing it on or it may become more entrenched.

Meticulous planning for learning coupled with carefully integrated classroom therapy enables pupils to make the best possible progress.

⁸ *Day six of exclusion: the extent and quality of provision for pupils*, Ofsted 2009; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080255>

Achieving excellence continued

19 Many of the schools discussed here constantly face the behaviour challenge, sometimes at its most extreme, and have positive strategies for responding to it. For example, on taking over at Cuckmere House – a school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, the headteacher set about communicating a philosophy of how children can learn to improve their behaviour based on raising their self-esteem and developing functional skills. Ensuring pupils achieve academic success, improve their social skills and develop greater self-confidence is at the heart of the school's outstanding performance. The headteacher sets high expectations and has a strong focus on learning and achievement. 'It's not just about behaviour, it's about being exciting; pupils must want to come to school.' One of his early moves was to introduce GCSE courses with an expectation that all pupils should gain examination passes in them.

20 Shropshire's Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service (the Tuition Service) and the Dacorum Education Support Centre in Hertfordshire have established such close liaison and protocols with mainstream schools that exclusion is minimised, dual enrolment is used as an alternative to exclusion, and return to the mainstream is maximised. Dacorum provides an extensive outreach service to support and advise staff in mainstream schools, seeking to pre-empt the possibility of exclusion. It aims to respond within two days and achieves this target much of the time. The Tuition Service, which provides for primary pupils – usually on dual registration – as well as secondary pupils, achieves almost 100% reintegration for primary pupils and, like Dacorum, a high rate at Key Stage 3. There is evidence that such provision greatly reduces exclusion across the areas served, as well as reducing the youth offending rate.

21 Piper Hill High School and Linden Bridge School have separate accommodation and intensive staffing for pupils with severe behaviour difficulties. This may be used for all or part of the time. The schools have taken imaginative approaches to these challenges. Piper Hill has a group of what it calls 'exceptional students'. These are students with particular challenges who need something over and above the standard provision. They are unable to work in groups all day and normally have staffing and rooms to themselves.

Cooling off in Piper Hill High School

The school took on a 16-year-old student excluded from a residential special school after that school had found him 'unmanageable'. Other staff and students were at a high risk of injury. The student was aggressive and prone to violent behaviour. He was diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorder and they needed to remove his anxiety about attendance at school. Piper Hill organised individualised provision in an out-of-school setting, with one-to-one supervision off site, and provided adventurous activities – horse-riding, cycling and climbing. He started to settle and then to spend time in school, joining in with other activities.

A second pupil, also with autistic spectrum disorder, came from a residential special school at 11 years old and was very aggressive. Staff were given physical intervention training. The student, now in Year 12, is attending the school's further education provision in the mornings and still does quite a lot of activities off site in the afternoons.

22 The school currently supports three students, who are exceptionally difficult to manage, on a two-to-one basis – two adults to one young person – owing to the severity of their aggressive behaviour. The school has converted separate accommodation to provide a safe but homely environment, which serves as a base to help students manage their behaviour. There is a career structure for teaching assistants that includes training on planning and delivery. All providers have a duty of care to teachers as well as students, particularly in physically challenging situations. Piper Hill trains staff in de-escalation strategies. These rely on interpersonal and communication skills. Staff get to know the triggers for poor behaviour and attempt to avoid these as the children learn to manage their behaviour.

23 Linden Bridge, which provides for autistic children, has used similar strategies.

Making inroads

One very challenging pupil came to Linden Bridge school at seven years old. He acted on a very short fuse and could be violent at times. His family was afraid of him. The school involved an external consultant to explore what they could do for this boy. It was decided to create a haven from two unused rooms at the back of the hall. One was used for enhanced provision; the other had soft furnishings so the child could not come to harm. Having this facility means they can keep severely autistic young people at the school longer and introduce gradual communal activity. The enhanced curriculum includes a lot of physical activity. The pupil became much calmer and more physically relaxed by the time he moved on to a 52-week residential school elsewhere in the country.

24 For such children and young people, even the daily transitions involved in leaving home, getting into the morning taxi and arriving at school 'were a nightmare'. Boarding provision can reduce the anxiety that some children face when moving from one location to another.

Raising standards, skills and self-esteem

25 What counts as achievement by many of the pupils with complex educational needs is so individual that assessment requires a high level of skill. Benchmarking is difficult – although not impossible. The schools provide for children whose potential is not presumed and whose achievements can be exceptional. The schools place a huge emphasis on the assessment of progress, in all its manifestations. The assessments are used to guide teaching, learning and support. They have the evidence to show what a child knows and understands and to show that a child can do what is expected of them. For many young people, the use of objectives is helping them believe in themselves and gain the maximum independence possible. The following examples show different aspects of achievement in these schools. Most of the examples

provided by the schools are of boys, which reflects the prevalence of boys in special schools.

26 The Tuition Service puts an emphasis on academic success, from learning to read to re-entry to mainstream provision and support for transition at 16. As a result, hardly any of the young people who pass through its hands are not in education, employment or training. Some do exceptionally well.

From exclusion to graduation

Four students of the Tuition Service have gone to university over the last four years. One, for example, who was excluded and never attended mainstream secondary school, did very well in physics and mathematics through the Tuition Service and read mathematics at the University of Warwick. Another read history at York and was disappointed by narrowly missing a first class honours degree.

Many go on to apprenticeships. One student was successfully placed at college: she desperately wanted to do mechanical engineering and the Tuition Service gave her the confidence to persist with it. High expectations abound. Pupils say, for example, 'I'm really pleased you made me do that.' The service also supports parents and raises their hopes and aspirations. Children and young people will often do more at the school than they would do at home.

Achieving excellence continued

27 Permanent exclusions are damaging. For a small number of Year 10 and 11 students, however, return to a mainstream school may no longer be the best option. To be able to support such students more effectively, Dacorum has established a Key Stage 4 base at the local college. The principles that make the centre's work successful are all here, particularly the careful monitoring of progress and close working with parents. The initial assessment is particularly detailed and involves several home visits. This enables staff to produce a personalised curriculum from a range of academic, vocational and applied options, including a wide range of courses run by other providers. The base is a very positive option for these students and has a remarkable success rate. Although only in its second year of operation, the centre is already thriving. It took 56 young people this year, and in its first year all but two of its students went on to further education or employment.

Winning them over

The Dacorum Key Stage 4 base's success with one particular young person provides a good example of its work. He came with a history of violence and an absence rate of 70%. To begin with, he would not take off his cap or lower his hood. Staff admit that they should really have excluded him on numerous occasions in his first few weeks: 'He could see he was beginning to achieve and was trying to ruin it for himself.' The turning point came when the centre manager visited his home and made it clear that they were not going to give up or exclude him. He developed his skills in art and creativity, and now has a college place arranged for next year. Before they leave, students produce a poster that shows their 'photo moments' from the last year – what they have gained (both in learning and wider experiences) and what they would put 'in the bin'. Poignantly, the thing that this student put in the bin was 'the way that I behaved in the past'.

28 At Ravenscliffe High School, the theme of never giving up on a child is reflected in the lengths to which staff will go to improve the lives of their young people.

Ingenuity prevails in Ravenscliffe

One pupil exhibited significant self-harming behaviours, involuntary writhing and repetitive movements of the arms and legs. He was often in restraints in his chair to ensure that he was not able to harm himself. At his previous school, his parents had expressed a desire for him to be re-introduced to water-based activities, which he had not been able to access since the age of nine, when his behaviours became too difficult to manage. When he arrived in Ravenscliffe, he had not routinely used a hoist for three years and this had become a barrier to his accessing some activities. Thus his parents were apprehensive about swimming, as he would need hoisting to enter the water. So the school, after consultation with parents, decided to start by using a spinal board from the local pool to move him to the water. This worked, but the school decided that it was not in keeping with maintaining his dignity. However, further research and manual handling training allowed staff to create a special sling. At first, six or seven staff were needed to use the sling, which clearly had practical implications. As time went on, the boy became more confident with hoisting and was increasingly showing off his newly acquired skills during this procedure. Staff were allowed to place him further into the water and his confidence increased markedly as a result. A major by-product of this was that, during his time in the water, his stress and anxiety levels lessened, leading to a marked reduction in episodes of self-harm.

Since then, he has been able to go canoeing successfully without the threat of self-harming. His parents have been amazed by this progress, which is another testament to the school's tenacity, creativity and belief in its pupils' potential.

29 Cuckmere House received a child into Year 5 who had very complex barriers to learning. He had attended two different primary schools and been excluded from both.

Multiple needs

The parents said, 'He has no confidence, he has never been in a school play or sports team.' The primary school did not feel able to take him on a school trip. His father said, 'They would not even allow him to do cycling proficiency.' After a term at Cuckmere House, he was in the end of term school play. His mother said, 'It was so wonderful to see him participating.' He has subsequently been on residential trips and joined in outdoor pursuits. Success is based on close links with parents and an expectation that all pupils will join in and achieve. Parents are made to feel welcome and included as partners in their sons' education. Careful assessment of the boy's individual needs, finding which skills he needed to improve, yet celebrating the things he could do well, contributed to his progress. He has recently sat several GCSE examinations and has gained a place on a social care course at a local college.

30 In the words of his father, 'They took a very troubled boy and turned him into a very polite young man who can deal with society.' The parents referred constantly to the high expectations and attractive displays around the school and how the school was 'not like a special school', but just like any other 'ordinary' school. These features of the school encouraged parents to accept the help the school offered rather than seeing attendance at a special school for behavioural, emotional and social disorders as in some way a failure or as the acceptance of a second-rate education.

31 James Brindley School provides for students with medical or mental health needs, some of which result in prolonged or periodic confinement to home, hospital or a teaching centre. Staff dedication is matched by the indomitable fortitude and cheerfulness of many young people who endure the most challenging medical conditions.

One pupil's success against the odds

One pupil who required extended medical involvement joined the school from a large comprehensive. He tried to return to school but couldn't cope because of his medical needs. His family felt that the comprehensive school was not suiting him because of its size and 'busyness'. The boy's condition deteriorated and he spent long spells in hospital in Years 8 and 9. James Brindley School allocated home-teaching staff to see him at the hospital, who continued to work with him when he returned home. The conditions were not right and he wanted to engage in learning away from the home environment. Staff took him to Dovedale, a small teaching room (part of the James Brindley campus) used for transition between home tuition and tuition in a centre, where he thrived. Then the boy's condition worsened and he went into hospital. When he eventually returned home after surgery, home tuition resumed until he rejoined Dovedale in Year 11. He decided to move back to Year 10 because of work missed, and gradually put on weight and gained strength. He joined James Brindley's pupil parliament. He coped with a school visit to France without nursing support and managed his own condition. GCSE successes followed.

Achieving excellence continued

A focus on learning and teaching

32 A focus on learning pervades the work of all the schools in this sample and is reflected particularly in the examples that follow. At Cuckmere House, learning targets are an important feature. Parents and pupils are involved in setting and reviewing them. Progress against targets is precisely recorded through the day so that the triggers of inappropriate behaviour can be discussed with pupils. Pupils feel empowered and feel that they are helping to shape their own improvement. Teaching is based on thorough assessment of what has been learnt and the provision of practical, kinaesthetic activities which are successful with those who find it difficult to concentrate.

Patterns in the processes of learning and teaching

- Staff at Cuckmere House constantly discuss how to meet the individual needs of pupils and how to make learning interesting.
- The thorough assessment of pupils ensures they get specific support to overcome barriers to learning and improve areas of weakness. Pupils are aware of their areas for improvement and are involved closely in setting targets.
- Behaviour is monitored throughout the day and discussed with pupils. This enables any problems to be picked up quickly and a solution discussed with the pupil.
- Each pupil has a weekly meeting to discuss her or his 'personal learning programme', which includes reviewing targets and any problems that might have arisen.
- The trusting relationships forged between pupils and staff encourage pupils to discuss openly the areas they need to improve. Pupils readily affirm the quality of the relationships.

33 The headteacher of Dacorum took up post 10 years ago, following a long period of interim arrangements. She had been in post for only three weeks when the centre was inspected. Inspectors judged that there was much to be done and identified five substantial key issues. She started to look at how people were being used and drew up a plan to use people's skills fully and effectively.

Culture shift

In the headteacher's own words, her main task was to 'shift the culture from behaviour to learning'. She developed highly robust systems and processes, emphasising the need for rigour in everything that the centre did. She changed the structure of responsibilities to reflect the centre's work more closely. Over the years the local authority's regular monitoring inspection reports recorded steady improvement. The next Ofsted inspection appeared to be going well: 'I was hearing very good feedback, but waiting for the "buts";' recalls the headteacher. 'In the end there were no "buts"; the judgement was "outstanding with no significant areas for development".'

34 The centre's work has grown enormously in the time the current headteacher has been there. Whatever the changes, the headteacher has no doubt about Dacorum's core purpose. 'We have to show these young people that they can be successful learners – they need to experience achievement. What I enjoy hearing is, "When I was at school I couldn't do that; now I can."' This focus on learning rather than behaviour is shared by the Tuition Service in Shropshire.

35 At Glyne Gap School, learning is seen as everyone’s business. Much is done to ensure that the quality of lessons is impressively high and the school provides all teachers with a full day a fortnight to plan them. In 2007/08, over nine out of 10 lessons observed by the headteacher were judged outstanding. Lesson observations focus sharply on learning, not teaching. When the headteacher observes, he tries to log the progress that each pupil makes during the lesson. He then discusses his findings with the teacher, agreeing a progress grade (1–4) for each of the pupils seen in the lesson. Only then does he turn to the impact of the teacher’s teaching on progress. The learning and progress of each individual pupil thus clearly guide any judgements about the quality of the lesson.

36 The school identifies nine key skills areas of the ‘craft of teaching’ (below). Induction and training are sharply focused on these nine areas, covering one in depth each term over a three-year period. The impact of training is evaluated.

Managing resources and teams	Assessment	Planning and curriculum delivery
Management of pupils	Challenge and expectations	Knowledge of pupils’ needs
Enabling independence and choice making	Classroom climate	Methods

Much of the school’s training and development is linked to an analysis of the individual needs of staff. Leaders see it as their responsibility to ensure that everyone reaches her or his potential and gains personal satisfaction from the work.

37 At Linden Bridge, because of the particular difficulties of its autistic pupils, lessons have to be highly structured. The school has adopted the TEACCH philosophy and training programme (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children).⁹ Linden Bridge is now a national centre of expertise in TEACCH. Structure, predictable routine and safety are very important to the pupils’ emotional well-being. Autistic

spectrum disorder difficulties described by the school include: focusing on detail and not seeing the whole picture; slowness to switch once engaged; concepts of time and organisation; rigidity; and sensory problems such as over-stimulation. The school’s response is to organise the environment so that it is orderly and predictable, and to adhere to familiar routines and use narrow interests as a basis for engaging in and broadening those interests. This response plays to the strengths of pupils with autism: they are predominantly visual learners, for whom routines are important, and they are engaged by interests. Some of the structural principles are shown below.

Types of structure	Explanations
Physical environment	Refers to the arrangement of furniture and materials to add meaning and context to the area or environment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define clear boundaries. ■ Minimise distractions. ■ Define areas, for example, group, play, transition and work.
Organising time	A visual clue or series of clues which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ indicate what activities will occur and in what sequence ■ allow the pupil to predict and prepare for what will happen next.
Work procedures	An individual system gives the pupils a systematic strategy to approach the work that needs to be completed. The learned strategy will help build independence and enable pupils to generalise skills into other environments.
Visual cues	Presents the schedule in a visual format which supports each pupil and ‘enables the child to know what to do on their worst day’.

⁹ Ofsted does not subscribe to particular methods used to address the learning and behaviour needs of young people, but uses examples that are successful in these 12 cases. Ofsted is very aware that there are many other successful strategies that are used in similar circumstances.

Achieving excellence continued

38 Pupils then have individual schedules, each giving a pictorial sequence and written description of what the pupil will be doing for the next block of time, which may vary in duration depending on what the pupil is comfortable with. These personalised sequences reassure the pupils and guide them through the day.

39 Schools providing for sensory deprivation have to go to extra lengths to ensure that teaching and learning are effective.

'Bilingual' teaching for hearing impaired children

A major factor in the success of teaching and learning in Frank Barnes School is the consistency in the use of language for each individual pupil. All classes are staffed by a fluent British Sign Language user working alongside a first language English user. This enables the full range of language needs to be met in all classes at any given time. The curriculum is delivered through British Sign Language and additional support is given to pupils in British Sign Language, English, or a combination of both to ensure full access to learning for all pupils. This additional input is well planned and implemented, so that it fully meets the language needs of all pupils in the school, ensuring that they continue to make outstanding progress in their lessons.

40 At Linden Lodge, new initiatives focus on improving teaching and learning further. For example, staff have designed new sensory 'Moon' books to support reading, developed a 'foundation' system of objects of reference to aid communication, and are currently designing a sensory bracelet which will be used to recognise pupils' achievements.¹⁰

Staff recruitment and development

Appointing the right staff

41 Predictably, when asked why the Dacorum Centre is so successful, the headteacher points to the quality of the staff: 'We are very selective in our recruitment. We see strengths and pull them out.' She encourages staff to work very flexibly: 'Nobody is precious about their job, including me. Everyone can do a bit of someone else's role.' It is seen as important that, where possible, staff work across the different aspects of the centre's work. Given the diverse needs of pupils, and the fact that a whole range of measures will inevitably already have failed, creative thinking is vital. The headteacher says, "We can't do this; it's too hard" isn't something that you tend to hear.' The key to the centre's success clearly also lies in its rigour. 'Absolutely everything we do is tracked and monitored.' Staff see it as vital that they can measure the impact of their work on children's learning, not just on their behaviour.

42 At Glyne Gap also, the principle that everyone's job is to help children learn means that selecting any new member of staff is a serious matter. The process focuses on 'you as a person and your values' rather than skills and experience. Every appointment of any member of staff involves the headteacher and governors and, as a minimum, an observed discussion, a type of in-tray exercise and at least one follow-up interview. This, however, is very much the minimum: appointments often take two days and, typically, include a range of different activities. Recruitment is also unequivocally rigorous at James Brindley.

Only the best will do

‘Since we have an outstanding school, we seek only to appoint good or outstanding teachers. They teach demonstration lessons here and pupils as well as staff observers give us feedback. Candidates are also visited in their own school. If they teach a satisfactory lesson, they are not appointed. The same rules apply to internal promotions, all of which are advertised across the staff. If staff want promotion, they have to be good at what they do.’

43 Staff selection is also crucial at the Tuition Service, where the service will not make an appointment unless there are high-quality candidates. The head of service wants confident staff who are not ‘looking over their shoulders’ when he is in any of the buildings. The chair of the management board, a local primary headteacher, is in no doubt about one of the main reasons for the success of the service.

The teachers we have, the type we want

Teaching is exceptional: well-organised, consistent and effective. The teachers are open and trusting of each other; they have an intuitive ability to feel what needs to be done and share their practice, not blind to fears and embarrassment. Teachers walk around with heads held high; children sense teachers’ confidence; the teachers don’t respond or react when challenged. There is a high degree of flexibility. Children who come in with a lot of baggage are given safe space in which to work on task, supported with emotional stability and provided with a lot of opportunity in the classroom.

The children also need structure and humour, and it is noticeable that the teachers are constantly smiling. As one said: ‘With grumpy miserable teachers, you get grumpy miserable kids. With every child, it is “meet and greet”. Everyone recognises and speaks to them.’

Investing in staff development

44 Typically, the teachers in these schools have come from mainstream backgrounds. The staff feel valued by their schools. They know that their continuing professional development needs are taken seriously and that they are encouraged to improve their skills and qualifications. This applies to teachers and support staff equally. Most of the schools quote examples of teaching assistants who have been supported in developing their skills and gaining qualifications, subsequently becoming qualified teachers. Staff are positively encouraged to proffer views, opinions and suggestions as to how the school can improve.

45 In Glyne Gap, for instance, the training and development of teaching assistants are taken very seriously. Several of them are pursuing higher-level study and a number have trained to be teachers at the school through the graduate teacher programme. A clear structure for teaching assistants helps to support their development. New assistants are placed on level 1 of the structure; once they have demonstrated their effectiveness, they move to level 2. To move to level 3, they must fulfil three criteria:

- three years’ experience as a teaching assistant
- NVQ at level 3
- a lesson observed by the headteacher and judged at least good.

Over time, a teaching assistant can progress to level 4. To apply to be a specialist teaching assistant, therefore, they must have reached at least level 3 in the structure.

46 Piper Hill knows that it cannot rest on its laurels. ‘When you think you have reached the top, there is always another peak to climb!’ The school has instituted regular learning-focused meetings for teachers and higher-level teaching assistants at which there is strong peer development and targets are examined. Peer development includes:

- learning walks
- professional development teams
- coaching as part of day-to-day techniques
- involvement of teaching assistants in assessing learning.

Achieving excellence continued

47 Teaching assistants attend all the training days and arrange other meetings on topics such as the teaching of groups, access to learning, curriculum areas and so on. The higher-level teaching assistants have access to a range of courses covering, for example, team leadership, leading and managing, and communication. The five training days are well planned to cover a range of school-initiated and mandatory topics. These have included lesson observation, moving and handling techniques, first aid training, the sensory curriculum and Science for All. There are weekly one-hour meetings on Tuesday nights providing training linked to school improvement priorities. A further meeting on Thursday afternoon each week is just for teachers. This amounts to a thorough and comprehensive approach to continuing professional development. Some training includes lunchtime organisers and is made available to other schools.

We will not appoint a teacher unless there are high-quality candidates.

Deployment of support staff

48 The value placed on support staff is often reflected in the way they are deployed and the level of responsibility assigned to them. Ravenscliffe provides one example of such practice.

Leading support assistants

The school has established the post of leading support assistants who have some management responsibility for different aspects of the school's work such as: sports and the community; independent travel; work-related learning; home-school liaison. They also have posts as learning mentors. There are also three further leading support assistants, one of whom is attached to each key stage. This structure has been developed as an alternative to higher-level teaching assistants as it is more suited to the school's staff profile. The leading support assistant is an important role, since it provides support for staff and a link with the management team. In addition, it provides a tangible career structure for support assistants who wish to make progress and take on more responsibilities.

49 Glyne Gap used its specialist status for cognition and learning as an opportunity to develop a system of specialist teaching assistants. Each works as a teaching assistant in the school for four days a week and as a specialist for the fifth. That may mean supporting or advising other staff, working directly with a pupil, or working in another school as an outreach teaching assistant. The roles cover a wide range of areas: home learning; 'portage' (which supports learning in the home); work experience; communications; healthy living; autistic spectrum disorders; and independent mobility. Each specialist teaching assistant is part of a team and most act as team leaders.

A bespoke curriculum

50 In general, these schools are leaders when it comes to personalising learning, while fulfilling the statutory requirement to ensure breadth and balance. The curriculum is tailored to individual needs, learning and progress are monitored – often microscopically – and teaching is guided by analysis of what has been learnt as well as by learning needs. In the schools where provision is shared with or may be resumed by mainstream schools, the curriculum takes account of this. For James Brindley, this challenge results in sustaining a vast, unpredictable and changing range of subjects, taught in groups, at the bedside or at home. Although the school can draw on schemes and materials from the ‘home’ schools as well as part-time specialist teaching, its success is due mainly to the versatility of its teaching staff and the highly developed use of information and communication technology (ICT). The Tuition Service is also highly committed to providing alternative education with clear exit routes.

A responsive curriculum

The bottom line in the Tuition Service is that ‘no child should be disadvantaged by coming into part of the Service’. The Service offers a large range of subjects and has access to a network of casual or part-time teachers to cover particular specialisms. The subjects and the range of other qualifications support personalised learning. The Service aims to provide a system which is resilient enough to survive changes of staff and providers. It empowers people to ‘develop their vision’. Many initiatives don’t come from the headteacher, for example, the Forest Schools work.¹¹ This is an important part of the curriculum. It has been evaluated and demonstrated to have a very positive effect on pupils’ learning. All the students who are there in Year 11 have a record of achievement. Other, less usual, qualifications include the John Muir Award – an equivalent of the Duke of Edinburgh Award.¹²

51 Glyne Gap’s curriculum is also highly individualised. It has two tiers.

■ **Tier 1: What the pupil actually needs to learn.** This is informed by input from staff and parents, P scales information,¹³ commercial checklists and schemes of work for English and mathematics. All pupils have termly goals, which must be expressed as ‘can do’ statements. They must be observable and represent each pupil’s essential learning.

■ **Tier 2: Breadth and balance.** This takes the form of a range of topics, modules and physical activities.

52 At Cuckmere House, an excellent curriculum has been established which tackles pupils’ individual areas of weakness, which usually include poor social skills and their limited skills in basic numeracy and literacy. The school is a lead practitioner for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning¹⁴ and offers several vocational courses, often through links with the local partnership, such as courses at the local college for some students in construction, catering and electrical installation.

The importance of adventure

It is recognised that some pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties have a thirst for excitement and the school provides this in large measure. As the headteacher often states, ‘Children have got to want to be here.’ The many regular activities include sailing, canoeing, rock-climbing, weekly outdoor pursuits and residential trips, for example to the Lake District and Hertfordshire. The headteacher leads some of these activities. Extra-curricular ‘extended day’ clubs and activities take place after school up until 7 or 8pm. The school introduced these in response to parents’ wishes, recognising that many pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties were at risk in the evenings if they had nothing to do.

¹¹ A Forest School is an innovative individual approach to outdoor play and learning which aims to encourage and inspire people of any age through outdoor experience.

¹² Across England, 14 students have the advanced award, which is specifically for conservation; four of them are students of the Tuition Service.

¹³ P scales outline attainment for students working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum. For further information, see: www.qcda.gov.uk/8541.aspx

¹⁴ Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning is an approach to promoting pupils’ social and emotional skills in order to support learning. For further information, see: <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>

Achieving excellence continued

53 The post-16 curriculum at Linden Bridge is vocationally oriented and the department is moving towards new Foundation Learning courses. It tries to give each student experience of working either beyond school or through in-school placements. Examples include working with children, catering and work in shops. The approach is highly individual; many students need to be accompanied by an adult member of staff. There is a strong emphasis on fostering independence, and close working with parents and the Connexions service to look at destinations post-16.

54 The school has good links with three local colleges, which provide suitable courses in engineering, care, and media and business studies, respectively. Redesigned courses in the school will all cater for functional skills, vocational areas and the Foundation Learning Tier, accredited through the Open College Network. Linden Bridge is the only designated school for autism to be part of the Surrey pilot for the Foundation Learning Curriculum. The school's aim is for all students to leave school with some form of accreditation. Currently this ranges from Entry Level to Level 2.

Assessment and tracking

55 Thorough monitoring of just about everything is central to Dacorum's success. The process begins with baseline assessments for all new pupils. They come into the centre with their National Curriculum levels, attendance figures and other information that might be available. As one member of staff put it: 'It's useful and it isn't. If they've been disaffected, that is often reflected in their levels, but it gives us a starting point.' A number of appointments are made for staff to carry out assessments in the core subjects and also to assess pupils' self-esteem, attitudes to learning and other factors. This provides a detailed report which is circulated to everyone. It helps staff in their planning and also provides a baseline against which the pupil's progress can be measured and the centre's effectiveness gauged.

56 Each pupil's attainment and progress are then tracked very closely. Assessments against National Curriculum levels are made every term. This provides a rigorous measure of the centre's success and reflects the emphasis

on achievement rather than on behaviour. It can also help the centre to achieve what it sees as its core function: re-engaging pupils in learning and giving them the feeling that they can achieve. The headteacher tells the story of a previously highly disaffected pupil running down the corridor shouting, 'I'm a Level 6!'

Rewards and sanctions

Pupils' wider progress is also closely tracked. Every child takes a colour-coded sheet to each lesson. It is completed to show whether they have met, exceeded or failed to meet their targets. Pupils are also given a mark for behaviour and for attitudes: the scale runs -1 and 1-5; 3 is satisfactory. The numbers are tracked very closely. Weekly points add up to vouchers which pupils can pool to take a trip out. The last one was to the London Eye. Any scores below 3 are added up and taken from 'negotiated time' at the end of the week, when pupils spend time doing something that they really enjoy, such as music or sport. Each score of 2 equates to one minute, a 1 to two minutes and a -1 to five minutes. These sanctions are absolutely and rigorously applied. Everyone starts on a green sheet, but moves to amber or red if they do not remain on track. It is noticeable, though, that everyone appears to have a green sheet. 'We sometimes move to amber, but I can't remember the last red,' the headteacher says. Attendance is also tracked very closely. The pupils enter their own attendance figures into a spreadsheet and draw up the attendance graphs. 'Many of the children come with poor patterns of attendance and this gives them ownership and responsibility.'

57 Staff at Glyne Gap spend a lot of time assessing pupils' progress. Using only numerical data is seen as much too simplistic; instead, staff talk about a 'jigsaw of evidence'. They base their assessments of progress on seven strands; each is taken into account and none is considered in isolation.

Zigzag books. All pupils have a large album that follows them through the school. Photographs and annotations are added by the class teacher to represent the pinnacle of the term's achievement, often linked to the goals set at the beginning of term. They enable someone to get a clear impression of progress over a long period. Parents can also look back over time to see the journey that their child has been on – this often helps to give them hope for the future.

Evaluated individual education plans. Individual education plans are very precise and enable progress to be measured.

Annual reports. These are very detailed and include clear references to pupils' progress in the P scales.

Liaison meetings. Every class is the subject of a termly liaison meeting which is attended by the headteacher, community paediatric nurse, linked social worker, outreach services, class teacher and teaching assistant. Membership is very stable, enabling clear comparisons to be made between different classes and children. The group talks about all the issues, but must also reach a corporate judgement of each pupil's progress – inadequate, satisfactory, good or outstanding. Meetings provide a clear challenge to the teacher, who must be able to substantiate his or her views about each pupil.

Monitored lessons. A week before the liaison meeting, the headteacher carries out lesson observations to judge the progress of each child.

Progress in the medium-term curriculum plans. The school tracks pupils' exposure to the curriculum through the programmes of study. This is particularly useful where the pupil has very severe needs, making it difficult to collect other information about progress.

Data. The expanded P scales are tracked in detail, identifying when a child has made progress. The school also uses software to challenge the progress of their pupils with the progress of pupils attending other schools.

All seven strands are used to identify each pupil's overall progress. The headteacher says, 'It is more of a living thing than just using data.'

Visionary and determined leadership

Transformation

58 When he arrived at Ash Field School, and with inspection looming, the new principal knew he had to shift the ethos from the primacy of therapy and care to a focus on learning. Provocatively, he began his first staff meeting by telling staff: 'I don't want this to be a school that is celebrated for the quality of its care.' It is not that this is an uncaring school – as he says, 'If we didn't care, we'd be monsters,' but the emphasis has subtly shifted to care designed to support learning. Realising that the large number of support staff were, if anything, more important than the much smaller number of teaching staff in setting this ethos, he set about making major changes to their work. Welfare assistants were renamed 'curriculum assistants'. He spent a training day with them, calculating how much time they spent on care activities. When they realised that this was not more than 40% of the time for anyone, he asked them, 'What can we best do with the rest of the time?'

The emphasis has shifted from therapy and care to care designed to support learning.

Achieving excellence continued

Comfort for learning

The principal introduced the idea of 'comfort for learning'. 'It is easy to get trapped into therapy – this takes second place now.' As if to illustrate this, lessons are regularly conducted in the therapy room and therapy in classrooms. He also set about making the roles of support staff more professional. Twelve years ago, only 5% of the support staff had any qualifications gained since school; within a few years, all but one did. Contracts for support staff were changed to include training time, and time was set aside for joint planning and liaison. There were other changes. Medical equipment was cleared away and every class became an 'examination class'. There is now external accreditation for everyone, through a wide range of qualifications that include GCSE, entry level, BTEC and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). He made curriculum planning sharper and more consistent, and improved school development planning and accountability by being much clearer about people's responsibilities. Acknowledging the significant demands of teaching at Ash Field, he developed lesson observation to help hone teachers' skills. He also 'went down the subject route to sharpen teachers up'. 'Above all,' he says, 'I needed to change attitudes, culture, thinking and behaviour.'

59 Equally, although Glyne Gap provides a very wide range of care for children and their families, when the school was concerned about the comfort of children in wheelchairs, it commissioned wheelchair engineers for 12 days a year. When it realised that some of the pupils had poor dental health, it arranged for a dentist to visit regularly. Concerned that physical barriers should not impede children's learning, the school set up a forum comprising teachers, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. The forum has a budget and meets to discuss children's needs and work out how to overcome physical barriers to their learning.

60 A common theme is calculated risk-taking in order to move things forward. The headteacher at James Brindley has pushed the boundaries. She is very entrepreneurial and an excellent networker. Part of the challenge is widening the vision of the many staff who have been at the school for a long time. They have tremendous passion and commitment, but become out of touch with mainstream developments. So the headteacher has tried to develop links and secondment opportunities into mainstream provision, and has also actively recruited new staff from mainstream schools. They either respond to the challenges or leave. Newcomers have shown themselves more than capable of doing the job, bringing fresh ideas and building on the experience of existing staff.

61 The current headteacher and partner head (formerly deputy) of Ravenscliffe share responsibilities for leadership and management. A main feature of the management of the school is the undemonstrative way they undertake their roles.

Continually high expectations

A major driver in their work is the belief that they are not yet good enough and can always improve further. They do not rest on their laurels in any way and this gives the school a feeling of dynamism and momentum which is tangible on entering the school. The leadership team, which comprises the headteacher and partner headteacher and a further assistant headteacher with responsibility for assessment and reporting, promotes the ethos of a secondary school, which is built on mainstream expectations and very much sees itself as a part of the full continuum of educational provision in Calderdale, not an addition to it.

62 Very strong partnerships exist with a wide range of outside agencies and other schools; these are mutually supportive. Although the school's aims were initially established not long after the appointment of the present headteacher, they are constantly reviewed and updated and remain relevant. The headteacher says that the aims haven't changed significantly in that time, but they have evolved and developed to reflect a more personalised approach to learning for pupils and greater involvement with the local community. They provide a strong feeling of continuity in the school's development.

Corporate improvement planning

The Ravenscliffe management team runs an annual management weekend. Leading up to this, the views of everyone involved with the school are solicited and fed into the work of the weekend. Staff are expected to respond to requests for views, in groups or individually. During the weekend, the self-evaluation form and the school improvement plan are reviewed and updated. This time is also used to look at the school's short-, medium- and long-term priorities and to ascertain whether the school's priorities have changed since the previous year. The governing body is also involved in this process and its committees have responsibility for contributing to the development of different aspects of self-evaluation.

63 In Piper Hill, the whole staff are inescapably involved in school evaluation, aimed at improving performance. Everyone has to produce hard evidence for their judgements. Views are sought from other agencies and visitors, and the school learns from what people say. School self-evaluation has a formal structure, but has regard for a huge range of informal inputs identifying what went well and how things could have gone even better. The school staff are very self-critical; when something was 'good with outstanding features', the school naturally wanted to know how to make it all outstanding.

No hiding place

At the end of each year, the school reviews what it has done. Good use is made of everyone's skills and talents; the 80 adults working in the school all contribute to learning and drive the school forward. Areas for improvement are used as opportunities for coaching. Everyone is involved in performance management and there is a 20-year history of job reviews. The headteacher feels performance management helps to drive the school forward. Her own targets relate to the school improvement plan. All targets (or objectives) are reviewed termly through monitoring progress and reflecting on strengths and weaknesses. The same principle applies to the staff as to the students. There are no double standards. Staff development rests on personalised learning, thinking skills, and staff looking at learning styles as well as teaching approaches. 'Performance management really moves us on; it is embedded in professional development.' For example, improving the teaching and standards in the foundation subjects from good to outstanding became a performance objective for everyone.

64 Although there is much effective distributed leadership in the schools described here, many of the headteachers appear as figureheads, strong and demanding leaders rather more than first among equals. The headteachers exude very strong vision and purpose, and they communicate a clear philosophy about what their school stands for and where it is going, but they also practise what they proclaim. They act as role models for the approach they wish everyone to adopt, without being restrictive. Where their senior teams subscribe to a common view as well as having the confidence to innovate and take responsibility, schools become supremely effective in their work.

Achieving excellence continued

The impact of effective leadership

Linden Bridge is driven by very high expectations of staff and pupils. It is a wonderfully calm but purposeful place, which manages to combine a very structured environment – having predictable routines and patterns for every part of the day – with a great deal of challenge, creativity and enjoyment. A deep understanding of the children and young people and the nature of autism is demonstrated in all the school's work, whether, for example, it is harnessing rather than suppressing obsessive behaviour and using it as a 'hook into learning' or capitalising on pupils' creativity to promote excellence in visual and performing arts. Staff have insight into and an understanding of each child's emotional state at any time. There is a philosophy of shared ownership and continuous improvement. Teamwork is pervasive, whether in classrooms, where several adults work together with common aims and goals, or in subject areas and departments, or at the level of senior leaders.

Building on excellence

65 There are no surprises in the ingredients of success of these outstanding schools. Common to all are recruiting, inducting and developing the best teachers, ensuring that the curriculum, teaching and learning meet the individual needs of pupils, rigorously assessing progress and making intelligent use of data.

66 The schools stand out, however, for their absolute commitment to continuous improvement. They have all built a very strong team ethos which acts in the interests of pupils. They go to great lengths to enrich the curriculum, providing extra excitement and challenge, as well as developing new skills. They involve pupils in the management of the school and the appointment of staff, and they work very closely with parents and a range of partners. All the schools work to achieve smooth reintegration or transition and are highly successful in this.

67 All the schools are at pains both to establish strong, effective teams and systems and to build productive links with a range of partners so as to serve the interests of their pupils best. The next section focuses on these aspects as keys to sustaining excellence.

The schools stand out for their absolute commitment to continuous improvement.

Sustaining excellence

Sustaining excellence

The schools all have strategies for sustaining excellence which combine the maintenance of consistently high standards in their practice with a constant focus on improvement and innovation.

The challenge

68 High expectations, well-tuned systems and high-quality staff working as a team are important components of these schools' work. Three examples reflect these fundamentals.

- The headteacher of Cuckmere House often talks about sustainability and is committed to setting up systems that all staff understand and can use. Staff also need to reach their own decisions. The headteacher stresses the need to be consistent and to follow up everything that has been agreed with staff. Staff meetings focus on positive issues, recognising that every student has some strengths and discussing how those can be built on. Because this is a school that wants to learn, staff readily accept suggestions from each other.
- At the heart of the Linden Lodge's positive ethos is the approach to change. Staff accept that change is inevitable and that it is a process and not an event. They feel positive about change rather than seeing it as an inconvenience, and link it with personal growth as well as school development. The staff demonstrate a strong self-belief and feeling of empowerment. As one commented, 'We are encouraged to have good ideas.' It is apparent that the high level of expertise and support from leadership has enabled staff to decide and own priorities, rather than feel that they are introducing changes in response to external pressure.

- Sustaining excellence through change is also part of the culture of James Brindley. The headteacher, who came two and a half years ago when it was already an outstanding school, faced the challenge of not only maintaining but improving on this standard. The staff were doing everything well, so there was no need to improve much apart from 'tweaking around the edges'. However, the headteacher took full advantage of three opportunities. The first was presented by two vacancies for deputy headteachers, which were filled to add strength to the school's leadership. The second was to focus the school – in discussion with stakeholders – on a culture of high standards. The third was to change the school's specialism to media arts. Some of the early benefits of this are shown below.

Media arts specialism

Initiatives and developments include the following:

- video-conferencing between children isolated from infection in 'barrier beds' and the classroom, so as to give them better access to learning
- a pupil parliament of 12 representatives, with those whose condition prevents physical presence at meetings being linked by video-conferencing and the website
- ICT and, more specifically, developing the use of accessible hand-held devices
- James Brindley television (JBTV), with screens in host sites where information can be broadcast across sites
- the first Year 11 leavers' prom – 'a fabulous event' and the first-ever formal social event many pupils had attended
- a Brindley's Got Talent show in which all sectors took part; the idea came from the pupil parliament.

Teamwork

69 The multiple needs of pupils require levels of teaching and personal support that can come only from an effective team approach by the adults involved. In these schools, teamwork is deeply embedded, whether at the class level, where several adults work together with common aims and goals, in subject areas and departments, or at the senior management level. The schools themselves identify teamwork as a crucial factor in sustaining excellence.

70 Leaders at Linden Bridge attribute the embedded teamwork to openness and involvement in policy development. There is a philosophy of shared ownership and school improvement. Everyone contributes views and ideas and all staff are involved in the school improvement plan. They share good practice and pitch in when something needs to be done, driven by a common interest in the school's children and young people. There are clear monitoring roles, but also lots of opportunities for sharing good practice, both within the school and with other schools in the Epsom and Ewell federation. No one works in isolation. The school harnesses the individual strengths and interests of teachers and assistants, in sport, for example, or music. Governors are closely and knowledgeably involved, for instance in monitoring the curriculum and encouraging progress towards the Healthy Schools award. The chair of the governing body is the mother of a former pupil. The well-being of staff is also important. There are protocols for managing distressing incidents and the school engages with a Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning approach with staff on team-building in-service training days.¹⁵ They have just enrolled on a work-life support programme in which the whole school's workforce is involved.

Distributed leadership and effective management

At Linden Bridge, the senior team members:

- include the deputy headteacher and four heads of department
- work in a supportive as well as a directive role
- lead by example, teach, are approachable, and seen by pupils as joining in
- have an established mentoring role, evolving into coaching as members of the senior management team gradually become trained
- have opportunities for sharing good practice in all spheres from departmentally to internationally
- provide inter-departmental support
- encourage ownership by leading whole-school consultation and open discussion on implementing changes, for example, on whether to use commercial ICT tools to support school self-evaluation, monitoring and recording.

71 Subject leaders coordinate their subjects across the whole school, except in English, mathematics and science, where the primary and secondary phases have their own subject leaders. Time is allowed for them to audit, monitor, observe and mentor colleagues before feeding back and sharing expertise and knowledge. Each head of department is responsible for more than one curriculum area.

¹⁵ Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, DCSF; <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>

Sustaining excellence *continued*

72 When teamwork looks so easy, it can be difficult to analyse why it works so well. At Ash Field, the principal stresses the importance of dispositions and attitudes more than skills and experience when appointing staff: ‘Someone can tick all the boxes at interview, but not get appointed if they don’t fit in with the school’s way.’ Risk-taking and innovation are encouraged. The principal says, ‘I am very tolerant of mistakes, but very intolerant of laxity and indifference. It is the commitment of staff, rather than hard-edged accountability, which drives the school forward.’ He also gives a clear lead on relationships. When he started, he told staff that he wanted the school to be judged by how well the lowest-paid member of staff was treated. Relationships between staff are excellent: they clearly enjoy each other’s company and there is plenty of laughter.

Comprehensive induction of new staff

Exemplary teamwork is supported by very thorough induction. All new staff, whether teachers or support staff, have a full week of induction. They meet different members of staff from all the professions in school, receive key training (including in moving and handling pupils), spend time in the office and observe the range of pupils’ activities, such as swimming and movement sessions. A few weeks later they are assessed to see what further training they require, including access to a wide range of specialist training. All staff receive a great deal of training in school from their peers. They appreciate the wide range of skills and expertise on the staff and the fact that this training fits the school context.

73 Although staff at Ash Field have clear specialist areas, they are not wedded to them. Roles and responsibilities are frequently changed, and staff who begin teaching primary-aged pupils may find themselves teaching 17-year-olds. The school states that ‘pressures on health budgets mean that the school has had to use its own budget to employ key medical staff.’ The principal sees this as having very clear pros and cons. Inevitably, while it has stretched other aspects of spending, it has also made it easier to link people together: ‘They are now able to do a better, more sophisticated job.’ Seen in a wider context, learning from examples such as this might inform the pooling of resources for health, social care and education under trust arrangements for services for children and young people.

Engaging pupils

74 Many of the comments from pupils, some of which have already been cited, show that they have recognised and appreciate the difference these schools have made to their lives. They know that the staff are there for them and that they treat them as individuals with their own special needs. The ideal, memorably expressed by the principal of Ash Field, would be shared by the other schools in this report. Despite the challenges that they face, he talks about the pupils’ ‘complete commitment to the joy of learning’ and describes the school as one that celebrates ‘how far forward children move as well as how high they jump’. The environment is so attuned to the children’s needs that they feel free to excel in whatever they choose.

75 Parents are much more likely than not to recognise the quality of provision for their children. Parents of Ravenscliffe pupils, for example, are very appreciative of the work that the school does. They are aware that the school recognises potential and has very high expectations, responding well to their children’s needs without patronising them. A parent described the school as treating the pupils in a way which was ‘about confidence and dignity’.

76 Of course, the staff of any school also have to be extremely good at building trust in their relationships with children. One teacher of disaffected pupils said: ‘The children that we work with typically no longer believe that adults want them to do well. That’s what they mean when they claim that “everyone is picking on me”.’ The Tuition Service echoes this. They have a small number of looked after children, living mainly with carers and foster carers. One had had a sequence of foster parents. He couldn’t accept praise because he had been let down too many times and there had been many insignificant adults in his life: ‘They help you by throwing you out,’ he said. It is reported that some parents even threaten to put their children into care if they misbehave. Children and young people from such backgrounds get angry and upset and lack trust in adults. The Tuition Service provides opportunities for success. It builds trust and dissolves pupils’ defensive barriers, but runs a tight ship. Children know what the consequences are; they do the same thing every day and every day there’s a fresh start, simply because the more emotionally upset you are, the less you can cope with the unexpected.

77 Dacorum has found a way of communicating pupils’ feedback to mainstream partner schools.

The power of the pen

At Dacorum, all pupils write their own pen portrait. A great deal of time is spent on it and staff encourage pupils to be impressively honest. In many cases, they offer pupils an opportunity to communicate things to staff at their mainstream school that they would otherwise never be able to say. The assistant headteacher of a partner secondary school describes how valuable these are. ‘One was for a lad that I had taught since Year 7 – he’s in Year 10 now. Even so, when I read it, it gave me lots of ideas about things to try with him.’

78 Staff must also be good at building relationships with parents, many of whom have become disillusioned and desensitised by the constant negative telephone calls from the mainstream school their children previously attended. There are weekly meetings at the centre and regular calls home with positive news: ‘In essence, what we are doing is reframing the young person for the school and their parents.’

School councils

79 The concept of suspension of disabilities is nowhere more evident than in the school councils which, in all the schools described here, give pupils a voice. James Brindley has made it possible for a parliament and student voice to operate effectively – not only physically, but also virtually through ICT and school radio. Together, these permeate all 14 sites. This has been one of the benefits of their media arts specialist status.

80 One important function of the school council in several of the schools has been its active role in the selecting and appointing of new staff. In Piper Hill, the school council has 17 members, including a representative from the exceptional group (see earlier). The council has made several mature requests, such as for training days for their professional development (just like the staff), a breakfast group and other provision. They are involved in interviewing staff. Their questions have included:

- What can you bring to this school?
- If a student has a personal or behavioural problem, how would you handle it?

They also want to set up peer mentoring and want a training policy with a professional development folder and end of year review. One student even decided to shadow the headteacher.

Sustaining excellence continued

Linden Bridge student council

The student council, which meets every week, makes a real contribution to the school, particularly in terms of well-being, students' rights and support for charities. Its members were timid to start with but gained confidence and now feel it is a safe place. They interviewed for the vacant post of deputy headteacher, having prepared and agreed their questions. The council has carried out surveys of students' views of matters varying from school meals to gaps in rights and responsibilities. They are great champions of the school – 'teachers are very helpful' – and members regularly talk about the school to parents and visitors or give presentations at training events held by the school. They are enthusiastic about work experience, describing in detail what they have done. Some students are articulate about the nature of autism and its challenges.

The schools all have pupil councils, some of which interview prospective new staff.

81 Pupil voice is greatly valued in the Ravenscliffe school community. All pupils attend their annual reviews and contribute to the meetings, which include target-setting. Pupils are also encouraged and supported to put forward their views through daily pastoral sessions with familiar staff. The school council, made up of a pupil elected from each year group, meets weekly, often inviting guest speakers to its meetings as well as actively seeking the views of their peers in pastoral sessions. In addition, the pupils have undertaken a series of activities related to the pupil voice, such as:

- annual election to the school council via the ballot box, with an input from Calderdale Council staff
- visits to the town hall by pupils to help with understanding the election process
- the production of brief manifestos for voters by the two candidates selected for each year group
- weekly working lunch meetings with the staff member overseeing the council
- the booking of appointments between school council members and staff, including the headteacher, to raise issues and take feedback.

Developing independence

82 An important aim for many pupils in special schools is, over time, to develop as great a measure of independence as possible. This is achieved in many ways. It starts with capitalising on every opportunity for pupils to take responsibility for themselves and the things they are doing. Developing life skills and social skills, adventure and education outside the classroom, work experience and residential opportunities all play a part.

83 Developing independence at Ravenscliffe is extremely well planned. The school runs several initiatives including the 'independence in a month' training, which 20 current students have experienced. Parents are involved from the beginning and students keep a log of their activities. The school also has such strong links with the community that members of the wider community are able to understand the pupils' needs and help them if they meet them during their independent travel times.

An initiative: independent travel

Ravenscliffe has a national reputation for promoting individual travel among its pupils. Initially, six pupils were identified to move away from the traditional local authority white minibus transport. Several of these pupils needed to catch two buses to get to school. Now, eight years on, over half the school's pupils travel independently or by yellow bus, including a pupil who has to travel 14 miles using a bus-train-bus combination. In 2001, the school received an award for the initiative, which included the time of a consultant. The consultant continues to advise the school in a less formal capacity and to help develop this area of its work. The school recognises that independent travel opens doors for pupils in their lives. Bearing in mind the types of pupils' need, it is an exceptional achievement to have provided this opportunity for so many pupils. The initiative exemplifies the school's approach to its pupils and their abilities.

84 Presently, 20 pupils travel fully independently and 40 use the yellow bus. This is a scheduled school bus; the pupils have to travel to the fixed pick-up points independently. This helps to nurture their skills of independence and gives them opportunities to put into practice what they have been taught about road safety. For some pupils, this is seen as a step towards full independent travel. Independence opens the door for them to attend

activities and clubs, which could be difficult otherwise because of transport restrictions. It has been an affirming initiative which has had a significant impact on the pupils' lives, as well as benefiting their families. Having achieved independence in their travel, four students were recently able to leave school to move into paid employment.

85 Calderdale Council is using this experience and expertise in its mainstream schools to wean children off costly taxis. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have made presentations to other local authorities. They are now about to provide consultancy to Orkney Islands Council. The good practice has also been recognised by the Department for Transport.

86 For older pupils, Ravenscliffe has developed Step up to Springboard and Springboard, which provide all pupils from Year 10 to Year 14 with opportunities for work-related learning.

Springboard

In Step up to Springboard, students who are not ready for external work experience are able to experience high-quality work-related learning within the school. This includes working with the school's own outstanding horticulture facilities. There are also opportunities to work in other areas of the school, such as the laundry, office, caretaking, hospitality and care. In these situations, students learn the day-to-day skills they will need in the future to be able to function effectively in the workplace. This can lead on to Springboard, which involves 35 local employers who provide valuable work experience opportunities. Although these employers are sourced by the school, they are approved by the local authority through the careers service.

Sustaining excellence *continued*

87 The post-16 curriculum at Linden Bridge is vocationally oriented and has a strong emphasis on fostering independence. The work-experience programme is highly individual; many students need to be accompanied by an adult member of staff. Parents and the Connexions service are closely involved in looking at destinations. The school has good links with three local colleges, which provide suitable courses in engineering, care, and media and business studies, respectively. Redesigned courses in the school will all cater for functional skills, vocational areas and Foundation Learning. The aim is for all to leave school with some form of accreditation, which currently is mainly at Level 1 with some students achieving Level 2. Post-16 students also have nine-week boarding opportunities for further development of life and social skills.

88 Ash Field School has an 18-bed residential area where pupils can stay overnight for a maximum of two nights a week. However, on any evening, typically between 10 and 25 pupils stay on. This gives them access to a wide range of extra support, enrichment or other activities and helps staff to provide highly personalised individual programmes. The most popular activity is the dance club, attended by over 20 children. They also work with outside sports coaches, play music, attend the youth club or catch up with homework or coursework. Some are helped to develop independent life skills in the school's flat.

89 Over two thirds of the pupils at Ash Field use these opportunities in some way. Staff describe it as truly 'consumer-driven'. Attendance is voluntary, but the area is always fully booked (often with a waiting list). There is also a residential youth council that steers the way in which the area works and the activities that are available.

90 Woodlands School tries to give children as many experiences beyond school as possible. They are not averse to risk-taking and do everything to try to interest and stimulate the children. They have recently taken up the creative curriculum, 'which is working well', and there is a strong link with the Chickenshed theatre company.¹⁶ The school is also closely involved in Aiming High for Disabled Children, a government initiative to provide short breaks for disabled children: two hours, overnight or a holiday break.¹⁷

Aiming High for Disabled Children at Woodlands and in Blackpool

The target group is children who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, who have particular movement and handling needs, medical needs or who are on the autistic spectrum. Every child is different and needs different support. There is continuing consultation with the young people at the school. Aiming High has suggested, for example, swimming and horse-riding, work on databases and more contact with the whole 0–18 age range. The team administrator for Aiming High has well-established links with the school, consults young people through assisted questionnaires, and organises holidays and play schemes in the summer. The school's extended services agenda means that it wants to add to the activities provided before and after school and, where possible, explore shared provision with mainstream schools. The children's responses to short breaks, play schemes and the presentations on DVD which record these activities are very positive. Some children's experiences at home are very limited; for instance, they play football indoors and don't have bikes or other large things to play with. The school goes the extra mile and teachers are willing to do this, working together effectively to provide appropriate opportunities, such as sculpture, which some children have responded to very positively.

¹⁶ The Chickenshed theatre company describes itself as 'the first centre to teach inclusive performing arts'. For further information, see: www.chickenshed.org.uk

¹⁷ For further information on Aiming High for Disabled Children, see: www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/ahdc/AHDC/

Working with parents

91 For all the schools, working in close partnership with parents underpins their success. In some of the schools, particularly where pupils' behaviour is challenging, staff may have to work very hard to engage parents, especially the few that can be abusive. Cuckmere House's liaison with parents has avoided the isolation often experienced by some behavioural, emotional and social difficulties schools. Regular communication and involvement are maintained through weekly reports and telephone calls. A strong feeling of trust exists between parents and the school, where concerns can be discussed without apportioning blame. Parents without cars are collected so they can attend open evenings. As a result, almost all attend to discuss their child's progress. Parents hold overwhelmingly positive views about the school and feel welcomed whenever they attend. One said, 'It's like a family.' The school's social worker and care staff visit families and promote effective parenting skills.

92 Glynegap fosters very close communication between parents and the class teacher. The headteacher himself visits every family at home, once children have been in the school for around a term. The home learning teaching assistant works closely with parents, frequently making home visits and advising on concerns such as sleep disturbance. The school also has a very full programme of portage, which supports learning in the home, led by its specialist teaching assistant and seven staff. The family and student adviser focuses on students at Key Stage 4 and beyond, supporting them through the transition from school to further education and beyond. She often visits colleges with students and their parents or meets staff from the local authority's adult services. The school also runs family days every half term; staff attend and run a range of activities. These events help to foster links between parents and siblings, helping them to provide mutual support.

93 At Dacorum, weekly meetings are held with each parent and pupil to review progress and set targets for the coming week. Attendance for parents is mandatory and staff are tenacious in ensuring that they all attend. This is followed up by detailed, regular written reports. A detailed exit report is produced when pupils leave the centre,

which includes information about achievement and the progress made in a range of aspects, including behaviour and attitudes. It also includes detailed information on strengths and areas for development in each subject. During a pupil's reintegration, a lunchtime meeting is held in the mainstream school for the staff of both schools in the partnership to explain and discuss the progress that has been made.

94 In schools for children and young people with profound and multiple difficulties, strong bonds can form between parents and the school. In Ravenscliffe, staff are extremely approachable and are known well by parents. Parents cite their 'confidence in the staff and their obvious enthusiasm and desire to do everything to the highest of standards'. The school often seeks the views of parents and parents are confident that these views are taken very seriously in helping to improve the school. There are many opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school and many social events are organised for parents and the local community.

Raising expectations and aspirations

The school's view of students has empowered parents to raise their own expectations of their children. Parents now meet regularly to support each other and to listen to a range of speakers on topics such as benefits and post-19 education. Due to the lack of post-19 opportunities, parents have helped set up the Next Step Trust to provide meaningful day care, physiotherapy, work links and ICT for school leavers. This initiative is actively supported by the school and 21 young adults now attend. There is a sharing of facilities, such as bikes, hydrotherapy, horticulture and aromatherapy, between the school and the trust.

Sustaining excellence continued

95 Close liaison with parents is indispensable where pupils have severe sensory impairment which greatly inhibits communication. In Frank Barnes School, the involvement of parents is an important part of the school's ethos of approaching the children's education holistically.

Support for parents

The school has developed a programme of support for parents based on the work of the National Deaf Children's Society. Key workers are assigned to families as needs arise and they visit the family homes. Families prioritised are those who don't go to signing classes or are considered to be hard to reach. Often this manifests itself as pupils not receiving much communication at home. Currently the project works with 12 families. The school is sensitive to the wide range of cultural backgrounds of its families and the key workers are representative of this range. There is a formal evaluation of the work of the project every six months and this has, so far, been very positive. Some families don't realise how much communication their child has and the project has enabled parents to realise that their children can communicate and converse, and started to provide parents with the tools needed to be able to communicate with their children.

96 In addition to this, the school prioritises home visits – parents can contact the school to ask for specific help about any issues which may be of concern to them. Initially there will be a phone call to parents for a brief chat, through a British Sign Language interpreter as necessary, to ascertain the details of the concern and this will then be followed by a visit to the home. These visits, which the school will facilitate, can be as the result of a range of problems the families may experience. For example, a visual timetable might be proposed to ease the frustrations that deaf children sometimes feel about not being involved in family plans. As a result, family plans do not come as

a surprise to the child concerned. The school can also identify any pupils who may need extra help. Pupils are open about irritations which they may have at home, as the school can sometimes be the only environment where they are understood. Community interpreters are always provided when families use languages other than English.

97 Linden Lodge has also established very close and productive relationships with parents. There is on-site residential provision for parents to stay and help their child settle in or to observe and join in the school's work.

Parents as part of the school family

Linden Lodge has an open door approach to communication, with parents able to drop in at any time to discuss their child's needs. Staff give parents their mobile phone numbers and regularly discuss the progress of children with their families. As one parent commented, 'The school is like a second family.' The school runs workshops for parents, for example on Makaton signing and the use of objects of reference. Staff also visit new provision with parents to aid pupils' transition.

98 This close relationship with parents and carers has a significant impact on pupils' learning and personal development. It enables staff to have a comprehensive knowledge of each pupil and ensures programmes designed at school can be consistently followed up at home. Finally, an annual past pupils' day enables former pupils and their parents to visit the school and keep in touch.

Linking with mainstream provision

99 All the schools seek to promote inclusion by linking with mainstream providers, even though for some young people, there is little interaction until after compulsory school age. For some of these schools, the mission is to provide for pupils who need support to cope in mainstream schools, or are missing out on mainstream education because of, for instance, medical needs.

100 Pupil referral units are at one end of the range of alternative provision which local authorities are required to make for children who cannot attend school.¹⁸ They are often viewed as a place where badly behaved children are sent. Some units have been described as being ‘like turnstiles – easy to get in, but no way out’. However, they can actually cater and provide education, full time or part time, for a wide range of pupils – those who cannot attend school because of medical problems, teenage mothers and pregnant schoolgirls, pupils who have been assessed as being school phobic, and those awaiting a school place. This is alongside children and young people who have been excluded or those at risk of exclusion.

Child-centred intervention and mediation

101 In Shropshire, the partnership between the Tuition Service and mainstream schools has evolved over many years, to the extent that exclusion does not provide an automatic passport into alternative provision. The local authority has turned the concept of pupil referral units on its head. Its policy is to make the service part of the authority’s framework, so that they are on an even keel with schools, not a servant of schools. There is no separate behaviour support outreach team. Schools must show what interventions they have tried and, if they have used permanent exclusion criteria, they have to consult the Inclusion Service before they exclude anyone. The Tuition Service helps to identify need and mediate in a way which is meaningful for children and young people. It looks at the learning profile of each child and the work at the centre is based on the philosophy that, if pupils are active learners, behaviour looks after itself.

Working with the school as an extended community

The Tuition Service has 35 primary places shared with schools. As the headteacher says, the Service is ‘not a garage – we don’t take them, fix them and put them back’. It works with the school as an extended community in Key Stages 1 and 2 and uses the same model for Key Stage 3 pupils.

There is no fixed time of intervention: the service is child-centred. But there are rigid, firm processes. After 16 weeks of intervention the pupils’ progress is assessed in terms of cognitive development, behaviour, learning styles, the input from the school, external inputs and other information. The service then sits down with parents and puts a programme together. Typical reintegration programmes last from two terms to 18 months. The level of mediation is tailored to pupils’ profiles. Their home and school must demonstrate some understanding. Educational psychologists are asked to reflect on what a placement with the service will achieve. The availability of the service is very reassuring to schools, because they know there is someone they can turn to who has measures for dealing with the problem. Transitions need to be managed. There is a sequence:

- resistance to support
- dependence on support
- outgrowing support.

The pupils become ready to move on and normally succeed in doing so. It is a cause for big celebration when they return to their school. The head of service does not believe that nurture groups solve the problem. He bases many of the solutions on active learning, together with the right sort of adult support.

¹⁸ Local authorities have a duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide suitable education for children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school.

Sustaining excellence *continued*

102 This sophisticated approach has evolved from what the head of service described as a ‘ragged situation’ in Shropshire 15 years previously, with unsuitable buildings where staff dealt as best they could with the ‘kids who were thrown at them’. Now, referral to the Tuition Service from a primary school has to be through an educational psychologist. In Key Stages 3 and 4, students come to the attention of the psychologist when they are at imminent risk of permanent exclusion. The Education Psychology Service tries to avoid ‘catapulting a child from a school into the Tuition Service’. Prevention is important and there are proper pathways for any potential referral. It is clear that all elements of the education service in Shropshire collaborate in matters of inclusion; different agencies and providers are talking to each other. The link educational psychologist has an important role in promoting dialogue about pupils who present a lot of challenges and helping schools to find ways forward with such pupils.

A psychologist’s perspective of the Tuition Service

‘The local authority is very good at putting in support, but to be successful there has to be careful withdrawal from and slow reintegration into school. Children are often quite damaged because of what the system has done to them. If 16 weeks has passed and there is not much improvement, the service can act to find the right solution. If a 50/50 approach doesn’t work, then the centre can adjust the programme to meet the needs of the child. The strengths of the service, particularly for children on the autistic spectrum, are:

- small class sizes
- excellent teaching
- clear boundaries
- strong consistency
- a wide and interesting curriculum and a rich range of out-of-school activities.’

103 The strategies for creating an integrated service focused on building a new understanding with schools, improving accommodation, running the service as much like a school as possible, and providing a wide and well-taught curriculum so that no child would be disadvantaged by spending time within the service. It accepts children from the age of five to 17. The first priority was to get proper buildings. A 10-year programme for the eight sites has so far provided four new buildings and two refurbishments, at an average cost of £1 million per centre. The provision is staffed so as to be as much like a school as possible. Initially, there was a recruitment problem, but there are now high-quality staff. Across the service, there are heads of subjects and teachers in charge of areas. There are additional specialist areas, for example in outdoor education, ICT, vocational education and enterprise. Specialisms, such as art, are taught across the service.

Returning to mainstream

104 The challenge for many education services is to prevent alternative education provision from becoming a permanent destination for children who present too many challenges for mainstream schools. Effective re-entry strategies are essential. At the primary level, the Tuition Service describes reintegration thus.

Returning to primary schools

The reintegration programme takes things one day at a time, one day a week for six weeks, gradually increasing. It may take two terms to reintegrate primary children. Normally, they go back to the school they were in. The centre tries not to transfer or keep pupils across the primary–secondary interface. They go back into mainstream to see if it works. ‘If they wobble, we bring them back.’ The service is involved in all transitions, primary to secondary. For pupils who are at the end of Year 6, the service works with secondary schools to prepare both the school and the pupil for reintegration. A high proportion of the primary children will have a statement of special educational needs and a dedicated education plan. They will be assessed and monitored by the educational psychologist linked to the school’s area.

105 Looking for ways virtually to eliminate permanent exclusions in their part of the county, Dacorum set up the secondary re-engagement programme.

Secondary re-engagement programme

Staff at Dacorum are always searching for new strategies and approaches to improve their work. They work very closely with their nine partner secondary schools, holding after-school surgeries to talk to staff and identify students that would benefit most from the programme. The programme is full time and lasts for six weeks. The emphasis is on very good teaching and learning, with lots of variety in lessons. Core subject work is carried out, but the focus is on teamwork and developing the skills needed to work effectively in the classroom and get on with other students. Crucially, children are mixed together: groups contain one student from each school.

106 As with all aspects of the centre's work, the focus is on rigour. A full baseline assessment is carried out and the students are closely monitored through the programme and back into school. Careful work ensures positive reintegration. In the week following the programme, the teacher spends time in the school supporting the student. The programme has certainly been successful: exclusions fell from 25 to two in its first year.

Preparing for transition

107 Preparation for life beyond compulsory school age is a deep concern of all the schools. The challenges are different for each young person. Some are ready to make their way in further and, occasionally, higher education; others need supported living arrangements and continuing training to help develop a measure of independence. For a small number of Year 10 and 11 students referred from mainstream education, reintegration in a mainstream school may no longer be an option.

108 Initiatives such as Dacorum's Key Stage 4 base at the local college and the vocational curriculum at Linden Bridge were described earlier. Work experience is an important part of such arrangements. Woodlands, for example, has had considerable success with supported work experience placements, which sometimes give rise to employment.

Screen star

From age 14, one young person said he wanted to work and attend college. During the transition phase, a Blackpool organisation called Progress Recruitment supported work experience and constructed a profile with the student's family and the school to explore options. While attending the school's further education unit, he accessed a wide range of supported work experience, including in the cinema, working in the cafe, ushering and so on. Staff were accepting and supportive. On leaving school, he went on other taster visits and had job interviews. Eventually a job opportunity came up in the Odeon and he was taken on. His employer, the manager of the Odeon, is very good and involves him closely. He quickly proved he was reliable and able to work well. Customers are loyal and greet him and all is going well.

Effective re-entry strategies are essential for pupils excluded from mainstream schools.

Sustaining excellence *continued*

109 The post-16 curriculum at Linden Bridge is vocationally oriented. The department is introducing a new Foundation Learning course. It already tries to give each student experience of working either beyond school or through in-school placements. Examples include: working with children, catering and work in shops. The approach is highly individual and many students need to be accompanied on their placement by a member of staff. There is a strong post-16 emphasis on fostering independence, and close working with parents and Connexions to look at destinations. Post-16 students also have nine-week boarding opportunities for further development of life and social skills. This makes a strong contribution to the development of self-reliance and cooperative living.

110 The school has good links with three colleges in the locality, which provide suitable courses in engineering, care, and media and business studies respectively. Redesigned courses in the school will all cater for functional skills, vocational areas and Foundation Learning – accredited through the Open College Network. Linden Bridge is the only school of its kind to be involved in the pilot Foundation Learning work. The aim is for all to leave school with some form of accreditation. This currently is represented by Level 1 accreditation, with a few who reach Level 2.

111 In Calderdale, the Ravenscliffe Plus project has been recently set up to work in parallel with the Next Step Trust, to provide continuing educational opportunities. Funded by the Learning and Skills Council, it was established to support students who were ready to leave Ravenscliffe, but had nowhere to go. This has run for one year so far and is providing for students with more complex needs who are not able to access the range of college courses that are available for more able students.

Pushing the limits

112 The schools featured in this report show that, in terms of improving the learning and lives of their children and young people, there is no thought of limits. For example, one girl with profound physical and communication

difficulties, whose speech is understood only by those who work most closely with her, is a strong and influential member of her school council in Piper Hill High School. In all the schools, there are examples of pupils doing things never believed possible by their parents, nor perhaps by their teachers until they tried them.

113 The typical drive, imagination and ambition of the schools for children and young people of the schools are represented well by the examples of Dacorum, in setting up a Key Stage 4 centre in a local further education college, and Frank Barnes School, which has established London's first sign bilingual early years centre.

First steps, first signs – for babies!

The centre was set up to create an integrated community based centre where deaf and hearing babies and toddlers can play, explore and learn together through British Sign Language and English. The aim is to develop and utilise pre-verbal language through the development of sign language. It is based on the use of spoken English and baby signs to allow babies and toddlers to develop expressive language at an early stage. The school runs the centre as a non-profit provision and subsidises families on low incomes and those who want to place their deaf child in the centre. The centre works to the principles set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework focusing on the individual child, developing positive relationships, providing an enabling environment and supporting learning and development. Presently there are 11 hearing children and two deaf children in the centre. In this provision, barriers to socialisation between the children are reduced as all are able to use some level of sign language to communicate. Early Years Foundation Stage assessments are used to monitor progress of all pupils in the centre. Parents whose children have passed through the centre have reported that the baby signs used in the centre have supported their early language acquisition.

114 The 12 schools are remarkable not only because their day-to-day practice is superb, but also because they are constantly looking to extend their pupils' opportunities. The staff show considerable ingenuity, dedication and determination in adding value for the pupils. They work very closely with other organisations and professionals, with business and the community, and especially with parents to extend the impact of their school beyond its walls. Moreover, it is never one person 'doing their thing'. As far as staff go, if initiatives are to work, safely and effectively, there is a team behind them, whose members all understand and subscribe to the venture. These schools show teamworking at its best.

115 In terms of succession planning, teamwork and distributed leadership, combined with a culture of professional development, provide considerable safeguards against any reversal of fortunes. Several of the headteachers leading these schools have taken on other roles, or moved on – temporarily or permanently – often into local authority roles, leaving their schools in good hands. In the few recent cases where the post of headteacher has been filled, highly qualified and experienced candidates have been appointed, and momentum sustained. These schools have emerged as rich centres of expertise as well as excellence in their wider educational communities. The next section illustrates how this expertise is applied beyond the school.

These schools are rich centres of expertise and excellence in their wider educational communities.

Sharing excellence

Sharing excellence

Outreach work is a well-established practice among many special schools in England, particularly where they are resourced for sharing their expertise, especially with mainstream providers. The schools in this report illustrate a range of ways in which their excellence and expertise can be applied to the greater good. In this sense, they all have ‘system leading’ roles.

System leadership

116 System leadership is a rapidly growing but recent phenomenon in the school system in England. Therefore Ofsted has only small-scale evidence of its effectiveness. System leaders are school leaders who work directly for the success and well-being of pupils and students in other schools as well as their own. The concept goes beyond the normal collaborative activities in which many schools are engaged. The clearest example of system leadership is the increasing number of National Leaders of Education and their National Support Schools. They are drawn from special as well as primary and secondary schools. These are headteachers whose leadership is recognised as outstanding by Ofsted and who meet a number of other searching criteria, including experience of improving a school in one of Ofsted’s categories of concern. Their schools also have to demonstrate the capacity to support other schools.

117 Only two of the schools, James Brindley and Ash Field, have been designated National Support Schools by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services, but all the headteachers and their schools in this report represent, to a greater or lesser extent, aspects of system leadership described in this section. These are highly effective leaders and schools which provide examples of:

- sharing their experience, knowledge and practice with other schools
- leading collaborative innovations in curriculum and pedagogy
- providing training for other professionals
- leading and brokering alliances of different professionals to provide for children and young people’s complex needs
- leading improvement across a formal partnership of schools
- taking responsibility for the improvement of another school.

Building capacity

118 Some of the schools have built additional capacity for external work beyond the normal outreach undertaken by schools of their type. The principal of Ash Field, for example, was increasingly being approached to undertake work with other schools. He saw the value of this work for Ash Field, but was troubled by the amount of time that he was out of school and the fact that he had no deputy. He was also concerned about the age profile of his senior team who were all likely to retire at the same time. The governors appointed an associate – now permanent – headteacher to work with him, who had a proven record as a headteacher and who, at the time, was working for the local authority. She is able to provide operational continuity when the principal is out, which may be for three days a week. The principal now does a wide range of work, including acting as a regional leader for the National College, a National Leader of Education and the national chair of the Local Leaders of Education programme. He is clear about the benefits for Ash Field

in his maintaining such a wide range of external links and work, but also acknowledges the important continuity that the headteacher's role provides for the school. The money that he earns from his work outside the school pays the equivalent of a headteacher's salary and provides useful additional resources for the school.

119 The headteacher of Woodlands School is on secondment to the local authority, giving his deputy experience of acting headship. In Ravenscliffe, the headteacher is coordinating the major sports initiative which is the school's specialism, and shares leadership and management responsibilities with his deputy, who has been appointed 'partner headteacher'. The head of Shropshire's Tuition Service is also on the senior management team of the local authority, and there are other examples of the other headteachers taking wider roles, usually accompanied by back-filling of their work and responsibilities. This provides opportunities for other staff to take on leadership roles.

Sharing expertise

120 Linden Bridge is typical of these schools which, as former Beacon schools, share their expertise very widely through a network of links. These embrace: mainstream schools, through working with teachers and with pupils on the autistic spectrum and coordinating support for special educational needs coordinators; other special schools, where they share expertise; local colleges; parents; and social services staff. The school has a reputation for being a good placement for training other professionals such as speech therapists. It is resourced by the local authority (to the tune of 1.5 full-time equivalent teachers, who, with a teaching assistant, provide outreach support work). They help other schools to develop inclusion strategies such as Learning and Inclusion For Everyone, and work with the National College on networked learning communities.

121 Dacorum offers a wide range of outreach support to primary and secondary schools. As with everything else, staff are concerned to measure their impact. They do this during and at the end of the intervention, and also a year later. Above all, staff are interested in the impact of their

work on levels of achievement. The standard primary input is a weekly session for six to eight weeks. The intervention begins with a discussion with the class teacher: 'We ask them – what would you like to see the child doing more of?' The team feels that it is important to set limits for the input, to avoid continuing with things that do not have a clear impact. Where problems persist, or are more serious, the primary team has an intensive support programme. This lasts for 10 weeks and involves daily input, some from the outreach teacher and some from the outreach teaching assistant. Required actions can then sometimes be quite extreme.

Primary outreach

In one school, the new headteacher was concerned about a Year 3 boy's behaviour and called in the team. The boy was, effectively, out of control, running around school and throwing things at other children. The outreach teacher realised that 'we had to take things back to basics'. The boy's timetable was reduced to one hour in class, supported by the outreach teaching assistant supported by an out-of-class programme. Targets were set to improve eye contact, listening skills, politeness to adults, concentration and turn-taking. Progress was made and the boy's timetable gradually increased.

Teachers in another school had become reticent about confronting a Year 4 boy who, because of a range of personal problems, was displaying some very worrying behaviour. Whatever staff did seemed simply to exacerbate the situation. A range of work including anger management, improving self-esteem and 'teacher-pleasing behaviour' followed. Daily sessions with the outreach teacher or teaching assistant involved some training and demonstration for the class teacher and teaching assistant on how to cope with the behaviour. The outreach teacher also taught the whole class herself, allowing time for the class teacher to rebuild relationships with the child.

Sharing excellence continued

122 Each of the nine secondary schools in the area has an attached outreach teacher from Dacorum who, typically, provides support equivalent to a day a week, although this is increased when necessary. The work is very flexible but is carefully planned with a senior leader. It can be one-to-one support from the outreach teacher, often with further support in class from the outreach teaching assistant, but it often also involves work with a department, class or group. More intensive support can be provided for particular problems. In many cases, this is from youth workers rather than teachers, acknowledging that students' attitudes to teachers may be a barrier to progress.

Troublesome teens

One school had particular problems with a group of Year 10 girls. A youth worker worked with the group on a range of issues, including relationships and sexual health. She used her time with the group to identify individual concerns and followed this up with tailored one-to-one intervention with each girl. The work led to a 90% reduction in the incidents of poor behaviour referred from this group. Outreach staff also keep a close eye on students to see who might benefit from the centre's secondary re-engagement programme.

123 James Brindley's expertise across the spectrum of medical, physical and mental health challenges is valued by other schools in Birmingham. One example is the school's work with traumatised young people in a local secondary school in Birmingham.

Terrifying traumas

The school has children of asylum-seeking and refugee families who have witnessed appalling events in war-torn parts of Africa such as Somalia, and, increasingly, in Afghanistan. The school had made few inroads with one group of nine pupils in Years 7 to 11. They were very aggressive, traumatised young people including one elective mute. They had physical knife scars as well as mental scars. They pushed staff, threw chairs, demonstrated extremes of behaviour and had been excluded repeatedly. A teacher from James Brindley who wanted to do work in mainstream took the group for a day a week for six weeks. She involved the parents and introduced the use of puppets through which the pupils could communicate their experiences, feelings and fears. They played games to build trust, developed a 'museum of loss' which focused on positive memories of family members, friends and pets, and the teacher won the trust of the pupils. The ground rule was that everything said was in total confidence unless it involved an issue of child protection. There has been only one exclusion since the programme started. Many techniques have been introduced and shared with the staff at the school, including the discipline: 'Think, think, ...speak.' Opportunities have been created to celebrate different cultures and a sense of enjoyment through learning.

124 Woodlands School undertakes a significant part of its work in a purpose-built classroom deliberately set in the centre of a local Catholic primary school, St John Vianneys (SJV). Pupils work in this primary base for periods of time during which there is considerable interaction with the primary children. The latter (Year 6) have written their own views about the arrangement.

“Woodlands schools link with SJV is really good and it can let the children play with the other children to help SJV children to be kind and caring I used to be in Woodlands school because I couldn't walk talk or read Woodlands helped me and now I'm in SJV. “

“The Woodlands link is special to our school because they take the care to involve them in a Catholic school where they experience them coming back and forth and enjoying any amount of days at our school. We have a very friendly environment in our school. Having woodlands school teaches us to be kind and caring and also teaches us to accept everyone and make conversation with people that we do not know.”

Curriculum innovation

125 Ash Field is committed to the value of new technology in releasing skills and abilities that may have lain unrecognised 20 years ago. The principal points to one ex-student, now able to pursue master's level study despite a severe disability. The school has acted as an assistive technology assessment centre for a number of years. As the coordinator reflects, 'It all began with the arrival of two BBC computers in 1984.' The school now provides support to over 600 students, who are able to access the curriculum via hardware and software that Ash Field has assessed as suitable and installed. The school provides full support, visiting children in their home school and training staff and parents. To begin with, 80% of supported children were in special schools; now 80% are in mainstream schools.

Transforming lives with ICT

As the coordinator at Ash Field says, 'With this technology we can transform lives.' To illustrate this, he tells the story of the boy who fell off a roof. He was brain-damaged and unable to play the squash and rugby that he lived for. He stopped attending his mainstream school and both he and his parents began to lose all hope. He was referred to Ash Field for an assistive technology assessment. The centre's coordinator describes how the boy and his parents left in tears: 'It was the first time that anyone had given them any hope.' He was kitted out with a range of equipment and became a student at Ash Field. Now an ex-student, he is a national champion in four sports.

Sharing excellence continued

126 Ravenscliffe has made impressive use of its campus. It has used its partnerships with the local community, businesses, schools and colleges to develop very impressive provision, including a sensory garden and a sound garden. In addition, a high-quality horticulture area has been developed in the school with large greenhouses for propagating seeds and cuttings, compost areas and vegetable beds, among other things. These areas are used to enhance the curriculum substantially through providing real contexts for areas such as citizenship, science and enterprise. The school has appointed a site manager with good horticultural knowledge who works closely with the staff and pupils to provide realistic opportunities to learn about this area. The provision, well differentiated to match individual needs, enables the school to offer activities ranging from work experience to sensory-based experiences, depending on a pupil's individual needs. In addition, pupils grow their own produce to eat and engage in health-related 'green exercise' in the process.

Community use

The horticultural facility is used by over a dozen primary schools and other community groups from the local area. This also helps to promote reverse inclusion, as pupils from other schools gain experience of working alongside Ravenscliffe pupils in their own environment, where they feel comfortable and well supported. Pupils from other secondary schools also use the area for work experience.

Providing training

127 As a Leading Edge school, Ash Field does a considerable amount to reach out and support other schools, staff and pupils.¹⁹ A number of children are on dual placements and staff work closely with the partner mainstream schools. In particular, Ash Field saw a gap in the training of teaching assistants and realised how much work in this area could enable them to influence the system. The school began by offering accredited courses for teaching assistants before setting up its own professional development centre, using specialist school and Leading Edge funding. The school is now a major training centre across the East Midlands region, working closely with a wide range of partners including the University of Northampton. The centre, now a Training School, offers an impressive range of training and development, including courses in alternative and augmentative communication, disability rights, and adapting the arts and PE curriculum to meet the needs of all children. It also offers courses for managers of teaching assistants and for new and experienced special educational needs coordinators. Around 98% of course participants judge the courses excellent. Wary of duplicating current provision, the schools set up a coordinating training group, which includes the local authority and all local training providers. In the year, the school provides training and placements for a wide range of students and professionals from more than 150 schools, colleges, universities and places of work.

Initial teacher education

Ash Field also works closely with initial teacher education providers. The trainees recently ranked the input on special education very highly, something that does not often happen on initial teacher education courses. One trainee reflected: 'Being here, talking to the children, has completely changed my views on disability.' Older pupils from Ash Field are often involved in sessions and a recent session on multi-agency work drew on their personal experiences of support.

128 Cuckmere House has been involved in a transition project which included working with three local primary schools and a secondary school to improve support for vulnerable pupils who might find transition from primary to secondary school difficult. Expectations of teachers and pupils were clarified and training given to teaching assistants to help prepare pupils. An agreed understanding of rewards, language and expectations was established and Cuckmere House provided training in 'restorative justice'. It has provided a clear template which all the project schools now follow and it has moved on to work with another group of schools. It has used its knowledge of behaviour management to help schools establish their own system. A local headteacher reported how successful the transition project had been. Children felt more confident, there was a shared approach to managing behaviour across the schools, and the increased skills of mainstream staff in dealing with behaviour had helped to avert problems.

129 Glyne Gap is another school that provides a wide range of training for other schools. A particular focus has been on supporting other schools in using the P scales. Their detailed versions of the P scales are freely available on the school's website and the school regularly hosts moderation events for P scales. To offer more intensive support in this area, the school now works closely with other schools for a whole year. They begin by training the class teacher, teaching assistant and special educational needs coordinator. Glyne Gap's staff then visit the school to provide direct support throughout the year.

Seamless transition arrangements depend on trust, understanding and people talking to each other.

Leading and brokering alliances to support children and families

130 Woodlands set about ensuring continuity when its pupils, on the caseload of children's social care services, reach 18 years and transfer to adult services. Blackpool local authority established a post of transition coordinator, funded by the Connexions service, to identify the problems in transition. The coordinator helped the school to set up a protocol with adult services. There is now a seamless system in which the transition coordinator attends every review from age 13 onwards, with both the children's social worker and the adults' social worker. The adults' social worker becomes involved early, when the young person is 16, although the children's social worker remains in charge at that stage. This is a model of good overlap which relies on trust and understanding and 'only works if people talk to each other'.

Leading a partnership of schools

131 The headteachers of both the Shropshire Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service and James Brindley are, in effect, leading partnerships of schools or units, providing for a spectrum of needs, as one coherent whole. One is dispersed county-wide, the other spans the City of Birmingham. The headteacher of the Tuition Service is a system leader by virtue of being part of the senior management team of the Shropshire Children and Young People's Services directorate. The headteacher of James Brindley was formerly the city's principal adviser for transforming secondary and special education and, through school improvement, has links with a number of secondary schools.

132 Cuckmere House runs a flexible learning centre which works with up to 16 primary-aged pupils. The purpose is to identify pupils at risk of exclusion from mainstream school and to design support. This includes attendance for up to two days each week at Cuckmere House, where specific literacy and social skills are tackled. Relationships between the student and staff in the mainstream school have often broken down. The teaching assistant from the mainstream school visits Cuckmere House and works alongside colleagues who demonstrate behavioural approaches. Teachers from Cuckmere House will also teach a lesson in the mainstream school. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning materials are adapted and shared with the partner schools. Cuckmere House is careful to ensure the same topics are followed while students are on a part-time placement, so that on return to mainstream school they have not fallen behind. Personal support programmes are drawn up and reviewed at monthly meetings with the pupils' parents and the mainstream school staff. Pupils normally begin a phased return to mainstream school after about six to eight weeks. As a result of its contribution to improving behaviour in other schools, the local authority holds very positive views of the school.

A local authority perspective

'This is a very positive school to work with. It is a creative school. They never do anything by half measures. The headteacher has been extremely effective in developing staff. They all take a role and it is a learning institution.' As a result of the partnership work, the local authority reports a fall in the number of pupils sent to other provision outside the county. It is particularly pleased with the primary flexible learning programme, which has improved the skills of staff in mainstream schools and led to a fall in exclusions. The local authority feels the school is not unduly expensive at around £12,000 per pupil per year – far less than the cost of sending pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties out of county.

133 The question of cost–benefit is pertinent but challenging. Shropshire points to direct or associated indicators, such as the virtual elimination of exclusions and a reduction in youth offending. Because of the Tuition Service, there is no need for a special school in Shropshire for primary-aged children with children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, although there is a small special school for such secondary-aged pupils. It is estimated that providing for children on the autistic spectrum through out-of-county provision costs £70,000 to £90,000 a year; the average cost for the 15% of children on the autistic spectrum within the Tuition Service is about £9,000.

Taking responsibility for the improvement of another school

134 The headteacher of Dacorum is frequently asked to take on wider responsibilities within the local authority, and in recent years she has overseen a number of aspects of local provision. For example, she has taken on the acting headship of a local school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and closed down another behavioural, emotional and social difficulties school, making arrangements to manage the interim provision. She took over an education support centre while a new headteacher was appointed and is about to do the same at another local centre. She is clear that Dacorum runs very smoothly and that it now has the necessary capacity to allow her to be able to do this work.

135 Piper Hill is very active in outreach and inter-school support work. It has a service-level agreement with Manchester local authority to support mainstream high schools; this provides 95 days of staff expertise to be used for workshops, facilitating a special needs network, and specific projects. Not a school to do things by halves, Piper Hill has a first specialism in mathematics and computing, for which it is the first school in Manchester. The school shares its expertise in mathematics and computing with Newall Green, Brookway School and the local community.

136 The headteacher is working with the local authority for a day a week as the school effectiveness officer for the other three special schools in the region, one of which has a notice to improve from Ofsted. The headteacher, and many staff from Piper Hill, also supported a school having a notice to improve until it came out of this category. Responding to an opportunity to meet a need, the school has also submitted a proposal, preparing a business case and costings, to develop another establishment as a centre for some students in the local authority who have highly complex needs and are not placed in school.

137 Ash Field is a school that is constantly looking outwards. The principal, as a National Leader of Education, does a considerable amount of school improvement work outside the school, much of it with mainstream schools. As special schools are so disparate, he finds that he often has more in common with mainstream schools. However, he also feels the need to 'see what is "normal" so that we can constantly reference what we do against it'. He sees this strong outward focus as an important model for children and young people who have disengaged from the mainstream.

New building programmes are incorporating special schools as hubs and centres of expertise in cross-phase provision for children and young people.

Into the future

138 These schools have solutions in their hands for many of the most difficult challenges in education at the level of the individual learner. They are all sharing this expertise to the limits of their capacity with other schools, both mainstream and special. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the system makes the most efficient use of this expertise. How many mainstream schools second staff into special schools, or vice versa, as part of professional development? How many special educational needs coordinators have direct links to special schools and not merely to other similar coordinators? How many local authorities have effective policies across their schools to identify and trigger expert support for pupils at risk of exclusion? How joined up are the educational, medical and social service support arrangements for young adults with profound or multiple learning difficulties?

139 Some of these questions are being considered by enlightened local authorities, such as Blackpool, which is planning to develop special schools as hubs – centres of expertise. Woodlands is set to be part of a brand new site for a sixth form college and secondary school, together with the special school. The local authority and the school see it as an opportunity to use Building Schools for the Future in a really interesting way. The new secondary phase special school will be developed as a hub with multi-agency teams, health care staff and extended schools staff. The existing school site is to be developed as a primary phase special school on similar lines. Effectively, the campus will comprise a children's centre and schools from 0 to 19: three schools which take children from across the local authority.

140 Piper Hill, whose expertise is recognised and widely used by Manchester City Council, will in future be co-located with St Paul's RC secondary and St Peter's primary schools with shared ICT. It has already undertaken substantial ICT development in the last four years. It has been a Beacon school and provides expertise to neighbouring schools in using ICT for learning, inclusion, communication, assessment and curriculum planning. Accessing knowledge has moved from buying software to accessing useful web links. Every pupil has a folder with

her or his learning targets in every learning area, supported by data and the identification of key skills. The new school will provide access to all of these remotely through ICT. All the planning, schemes of work and targets are on the management information system. This is of use to all staff, especially new members of staff. It benefits the teachers' planning and the support structure for teaching assistants. The school is also involved in animation projects, a lunchtime ICT club, an after-school club and programmes on e-safety. It has developed modules of work appropriate for young teenagers and worked hard on a new scheme of work for ICT. The school is very clear about what it wants and about the need for functional simplicity.

141 It is clear that in challenging circumstances schools like these share with the outstanding primary and secondary schools the secrets of success. If replicated by schools at large, these could transform education for children and young people in England. These outstanding special schools enable every pupil to succeed to the greatest extent possible. In doing so, they provide national, if not world class, examples of real teamwork; real personalisation of learning; real inclusion; fine-grained assessment and sustained high expectations; and a belief in what is being done leading to strong achievement. They bring the best possible benefits to the children and young people for whom they provide. Moreover, they bring relief and cheer to – and raise the aspirations of – parents and families, and enlist the understanding and support of communities. The schools harness the talents of different professions and develop the skills of lay assistants to high levels. These are the schools that never wittingly let children down. The system has much to learn from them.

Pictures of success: the outstanding schools

These portraits provide an introduction to each of the 12 schools.

The portraits are impressions, compiled after visiting the schools and meeting their headteachers and others. The narratives give a flavour of some of the values and strategies found in these schools. Inevitably they feature the headteachers, whose leadership is an important part of each story, although in every school there is extensive distribution of leadership and very strong teamwork.

The portraits do not seek to reproduce the schools' latest inspection reports or their own web pages and publications, as these are readily available online.

Although the 12 headteachers have approved the profiles of their own schools, they did not choose or seek to influence the contents.

Ash Field School, Leicester City

'Ash Field is an outstanding school. As one senior pupil put it, 'They don't just look at the cover, they look inside.' ...Under the inspirational leadership of the principal, headteacher and chair of governors, staff are united in their efforts to provide the best they can for pupils.' (Ofsted, 2006)

Two heads appear to be better than one at Ash Field School. With the principal's wide and growing external role and the school's undoubted complexity, Ash Field is now run by both a principal, David Bateson, and a headteacher, Jane Booth. The formula works, since the school not only goes from strength to strength, but is also able to play a vigorous role in supporting other schools, staff and pupils across Leicester and the East Midlands.

The school serves children and young people with a diverse range of needs. It runs from the Early Years Foundation Stage to further education, takes children from five local authorities and has boarding provision. The children are affected primarily by a physical disability, but have a range of additional needs. The scale of need runs from a small number of ambulant pupils to many who have very complex needs that include total physical dependency and no ability to communicate orally. Despite this, staff are refreshingly unwilling to

place the children in pigeon holes: each is treated as an individual, with her or his particular needs. The children are clear how they feel about the school: 'We are like a big family. If anything bad happens, we are always there for each other.' The school aims to 'run on relationships, not rules'.

Although judged to be outstanding, the school does not consider what it does is ever good enough. Children are seen as the school's 'customers', for whom the school aims to be stimulating, enjoyable and fun. This is particularly important given that around 20% of the children have progressive conditions that limit their life expectancy. The principal's view is that the school's success depends on excellent teamwork and on perfecting the quality of teaching and learning so that individuals achieve as well as they can. Clear systems and processes help to sustain the right ethos, liberate staff to be creative and ensure the school's continuing improvement. The school also believes in looking outside and constantly testing itself against external criteria such as Investors in People and Artsmark.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	107
% minority ethnic	46%
Age range	4-19
Post-compulsory	32

Inspection report grades (2006)

Outstanding	24
Good	3
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Needs of pupils

Mainly physical but with a mixture of medical, sensory, communication, intellectual, emotional and social needs.

Growing shift towards increased complexity.

About 20% of pupils have progressive conditions.

Cuckmere House School, East Sussex

'This excellent school does an exceptional job in helping pupils who have had a troubled past and inconsistent schooling to change their behaviour and to develop a hunger to learn.'
(Ofsted, 2008)

Pupils come from a wide catchment area, which includes the whole of the county, to this day and residential school for boys with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has specialist status of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and is also responsible for running two other pupil referral units. It is federated with another behavioural, emotional and social difficulties school in the area. The headteacher, Frank Stanford, is the executive headteacher of the two schools. He communicates a clear philosophy of how children and young people can learn to improve their behaviour, based on developing their self-esteem and functional skills.

Ensuring pupils achieve academic success, improving their social skills and developing their greater self-confidence are at the heart of the school's outstanding work. The headteacher sets high expectations and encourages a strong focus on learning and achievement. 'It's not just about behaviour. It's about being exciting. Pupils must want to come to school.' The introduction of GCSE courses carries an expectation that all pupils should gain examination passes in them.

The school environment is made attractive with high-quality displays of pupils' work. If any damage takes place, it is immediately repaired. Displays do not have plastic screens as in some behavioural, emotional and social difficulties schools. The school is very inviting, despite being an old building with several temporary classrooms. Key appointments have been made to establish a balanced senior management team. A deputy headteacher was recruited from a mainstream secondary school to bolster curriculum development and develop suitable courses. The particular skills of staff are spotted and developed for the benefit of the school. For example, a competent musician was encouraged to set up a recording suite where pupils can edit and cut their own CDs. Music is now a popular subject. Two former teaching assistants are now qualified teachers in senior positions.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	54
% minority ethnic	6%
Age range	5-16
Post-compulsory	0

Inspection report grades (2008)

Outstanding	25
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

Severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Almost all pupils were permanently excluded from their previous school.

Up to 13 pupils are in a pupil referral unit located in the main school building. Some are dual registered but in danger of exclusion from their mainstream school, so they attend Cuckmere House part time.

The special activities unit provides for a group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have particularly severe additional difficulties associated with their behaviour.

Dacorum Education Support Centre Hertfordshire

'Pupils make outstanding progress because extremely effective leadership has assured an excellent ethos for learning, teaching of the highest quality and an extremely well-thought-out curriculum matched precisely to pupils' needs.' (Ofsted, 2008)

As a pupil referral unit with a large outreach programme, Dacorum Education Support Centre deals with some challenging children. It is certainly no soft option. As the headteacher, Rena Harris-Cooksley, says: 'We try to mimic an ordinary school as much as possible. I didn't want this to be a tracksuit and trainers sort of a place.' Pupils are expected to attend the centre in the uniforms of their mainstream school.

Dacorum's work has grown considerably in the last 10 years. Serving a wide area of Hertfordshire and employing almost 50 staff, the centre has three arms. The main centre was augmented two years ago by a base for Key Stage 4 students on the campus of the local further education college; there are also large primary and secondary outreach programmes. Whatever the changes, Dacorum's core purpose is to show its young people that they can be successful learners – by experiencing achievement. A typical response is: 'When I was at school I couldn't do that; now I can.'

The ability to build strong relationships is key to Dacorum's success. Relationships with local schools are very strong and there has been extensive collaborative work. This has enabled the centre to identify needs at an early stage, facilitate managed moves and considerably reduce permanent exclusions. A number of factors contribute to such positive partnership work. The head clearly has the ability to persuade and influence her colleagues, but the centre's credibility is crucial. The assistant headteacher of a local school feels that Dacorum has this credibility because of the 'willingness of staff to go the extra mile'. He sees the reintegration process for students on managed moves as 'like taking the stabilisers off a bike – not just ticking boxes. If there is a problem, we know that they are there for us.' Another key to the centre's success is the rigour with which it operates. Everything the centre does is tracked and its effect monitored. Staff see it as vital to be able to measure the impact of their work on children's learning (not just on their behaviour).

School data (2008)

Number on roll	39
% minority ethnic	Low
Age range	11–16
Post-compulsory	-

Inspection report grades (2006)

Outstanding	20
Good	5
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Needs of pupils

The centre caters for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have been excluded or are at severe risk of being excluded from mainstream education.

Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Camden

'Pupils' achievements are excellent because of very high-quality teaching. Excellent care, guidance and support means their personal development is outstanding.' (Ofsted, 2009)

In the school, 77% of the pupils use hearing aids and 19% have cochlear implants. Approximately 69% of pupils have special educational needs additional to their deafness. Eleven per cent of pupils have medical needs and 19% have sight problems. Twelve per cent of pupils are registered as deaf-blind. Thirty-five per cent of children receive specialised one-to-one support. Almost all children are from hearing families and the school cites this as having a significant impact on their language acquisition.

The school is fully staffed with a mixture of hearing and deaf staff at all tiers of its structure. Fifty per cent of staff are deaf, with 50% of classroom staff being deaf with British Sign Language as their first language. The school operates a 'sign bilingual' philosophy, which recognises and values the importance of both English and British Sign Language in the lives of children who are deaf.

It is planned to relocate the school to the site of a mainstream school. The schools would be separate and retain their own budgets and so on, but they would share some facilities and provide opportunities for

mutual inclusion. The whole community on the new site will receive deaf awareness training and inclusion opportunities will be bespoke, meeting the needs of the individual pupils.

The aim is for the intake of Frank Barnes to broaden from severe/profoundly deaf to take in the full range of deafness and those pupils with additional special educational needs and disabilities. Camden Council is running a series of conferences for a wide range of professionals to promote an understanding of sign bilingualism as a fully inclusive philosophy which includes the promotion of spoken language when appropriate, particularly with children who have cochlear implants. The school supports the view that the use of British Sign Language supports language acquisition and cognition, enabling pupils to subsequently acquire English successfully, once language skills have developed.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	36
% minority ethnic	40%
Age range	0-11
Post-compulsory	-

Inspection report grades (2009)

Outstanding	30
Good	2
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Needs of pupils

Frank Barnes School is a primary school for profoundly deaf children. It is a diverse community and pupils come from a wide range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Ninety-six per cent of pupils travel to and from school by local authority transport. The school has a large number of children who come from single parent families and the number of pupils entitled to free school meals is 38%. Thirty-five per cent of pupils come from families whose first language is one other than British Sign Language or English and there are nine different languages spoken within these homes.

Glyne Gap School, East Sussex

'This is an outstanding school which goes from strength to strength. Although standards are well below average on account of pupils' learning difficulties, all pupils make exceptional progress, from Foundation Stage to the sixth form. The headteacher and other leaders have very high expectations of what pupils and staff can achieve, and give them the skills and support to succeed.' (Ofsted, 2006)

John Hassell, the headteacher of Glyne Gap, leaves you in no doubt about what he sees as the value of learning at his school: 'Learning is important here because it brings about independent and autonomous living, and gives our students a quality of life and happiness that they wouldn't otherwise have.'

There is no doubt that the school has made an enormous impact on the lives of hundreds of young people. Teachers have excellent knowledge of pupils' difficulties and provide work that is challenging but achievable. That crucial link – between learning, independence and happiness – is talked about a lot. It means an emphasis on what the school describes as 'tough love': 'What we guard against is learned helplessness. If children want jam on their toast, they know that no one is going to get

it for them.' Pupils are not 'cocooned': they are trained and helped to live independent, fulfilled lives.

The school's provision has grown enormously in recent years. An integrated nursery in the adjoining mainstream primary school takes a mixture of Glyne Gap and other children. A well-developed portage programme (which supports learning in the home) runs from the nursery. The local further education college also houses a Glyne Gap base (the 'faculty'). The faculty's centre is at the heart of the college buildings, enabling Glyne Gap students to mix easily with other students. The school also owns a flat in the centre of town that it uses to help young people to develop vital independent living skills. The school has specialist school recognition focusing on cognition and learning.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	104
% minority ethnic	4%
Age range	2–19
Pre- and post- compulsory	14, 19

Inspection report grades (2006)

Outstanding	23
Good	3
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

The school admits pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism, mostly from around Hastings, an area of significant social deprivation.

Thirty-five per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, double the national average.

James Brindley School, Birmingham

'James Brindley is an outstandingly effective school. The new headteacher together with the newly appointed senior staff are relentless in their pursuit of school improvement... and strive to make the school "outstanding plus".' (Ofsted, 2008)

James Brindley School seeks to provide a high-quality education in a supportive and achieving environment for all children and young people unable to attend mainstream school because of a wide range of medical and mental health needs. Designated a special school, it is a hospital school spread across a federation of 14 sites and provides extensive home tuition. About 5,000 pupils are taught each year, up to 500 or so at any one time. The school caters for wide diversity and home circumstances that represent the city at large. It gained specialist status in media arts and is preparing for a second specialism. The school teaches the full curriculum to GCSE, tailored to each individual pupil.

The headteacher for the last two years, Nicky Kendall, took over an outstanding school that was confirmed by the 2008 inspection soon after she arrived. The school is a complex and diverse organisation which is led and managed exceptionally well and inspectors found that teaching was of 'exceptionally high quality'. The report also writes of a 'highly personalised approach to pupils'

learning' which is essential with a large proportion of teaching at the bedside and in the home involving a transient population of pupils. The initial assessment of pupils' achievements and needs and the ongoing assessment of their progress are of high quality.

The school has a strong leadership team and federation-wide curriculum leaders. There are active staff working groups on, for example, teaching and learning, intervention and coaching, very coherent leadership structures with coordinators working across the federation, and active international links with major providers overseas. This all adds up to an ambition to go beyond outstanding and become no less than world class.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	387
% minority ethnic	30%
Age range	3-19
Pre- and post- compulsory	16, 30

Inspection report grades (2006)

Outstanding	23
Good	3
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

The pupils have a range of medical and educational needs and the school successfully addresses medical barriers to learning.

The length of stay in paediatric wards ranges from a few days to a year or more.

Many children with medical conditions are also educated at home.

Linden Bridge School, Surrey

'Linden Bridge is an outstanding school. Strong and determined leadership and management have enabled the school to move forward at the rapid pace seen at the last inspection. Teachers' planning has a clear focus on the needs of individuals. The professionalism and commitment of the support staff play a significant part helping all pupils to achieve of their best.' (Ofsted, 2008)

The school is housed in several buildings on a pleasant, wooded suburban site. It has been recognised for its excellence in providing for children with autism since its first Ofsted report in 1997. It sets out to offer the pupils as near a normal school and residential experience as possible by helping them achieve strategies to reduce the effect of autism on their everyday lives. This is done with immense forethought and care.

The school is oversubscribed. It is organised in primary, secondary, further education and boarding departments. Boys greatly outnumber girls, a reflection of the incidence of autism. The school's boarding provision is used educationally in blocks of time by older school pupils and post-compulsory students to reinforce their personal and social development and prepare them for life beyond school. The headteacher, Ronwen Smith, arrived at the school soon after it opened in 1978 and

became headteacher in 1996. She has a very clear vision of how the school should continue to develop, recognised and supported by the governors. Many staff are of long standing and turnover is low. The headteacher and senior management team provide cohesive and consistent leadership of a large staff whose teamwork is readily apparent. Strong teamwork is one of the key strengths of the school.

The school is authoritative about its specialism, drawing from international best practice in applying the teaching approaches it considers best suited to its pupils. It constantly looks for improvement. The school also highlights leadership and teamwork, monitoring and assessment, personal development and achievement, and vocational opportunities as key elements in sustaining excellence.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	118
% minority ethnic	13%
Age range	4-19
Pre- and post-compulsory	8, 24

Inspection report grades (2006)

Outstanding	27
Good	0
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

Autism.

The school is a day school with residential provision. Twenty-five boarding places cater for pupils aged nine and upwards.

Linden Lodge School, Wandsworth

'Linden Lodge is an exceptionally effective school that provides an outstanding quality of education and care for very vulnerable pupils... Pupils make giant strides academically from their points of entry to the school.'
(Ofsted, 2007)

Linden Lodge is a large day and residential special school. Approximately 130 staff work at the school, including 30 teachers, 19 care staff, and 80 learning and individual support assistants. The school also provides mobility training and a wide range of therapy, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and music and play therapy. A nurse is on site to cater for pupils' medical needs. Pupils come from a wide catchment area, which is generally in the London area circumscribed by the M25. The school has become a popular regional resource.

About a third of pupils attend as full or part boarders for between one and four nights each week. The needs of pupils have become increasingly complex in recent years and in response, the school has established the Harris Centre, a specialist provision for 21 secondary and post-16 students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school is engaged in a range of outreach work which includes assessment and support for approximately 240 pupils with visual impairment

and complex needs in local schools and neighbouring local authorities.

According to the local authority link inspector, the success of the school is due to 'the complete lack of complacency' and 'the constant desire to improve'. Much of this ethos is linked to the passion of the principal, Roger Legate. Staff report that the principal is a very effective motivator. They also state that senior leaders always listen to new ideas; as one teacher said, 'You don't have to battle to be heard.' There is effective delegation and staff at different levels feel able to talk about their roles and responsibilities. Staff often change roles/responsibilities within the school, which encourages them to grow and develop new professional skills. The delegation of responsibility to staff strengthens succession planning for the school. It is also an important factor in ensuring that a large school, with a wide variety of professionals working in it, functions effectively.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	103
% minority ethnic	45%
Age range	3-19
Pre- and post- compulsory	10, 28

Inspection report grades (2007)

Outstanding	25
Good	1
Satisfactory	1
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

A wide range of sight problems and other very complex needs, including pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Piper Hill High School, Manchester

‘Students consider that Piper Hill is a “good place to be”. One reason for their enthusiasm is the outstanding curriculum which offers a breathtaking variety of activities...’
(Ofsted, 2008)

Looking back at previous inspections, the headteacher of six and a half years, Linda Jones, said, ‘Once you are very good, you start getting a bit of confidence and taking a few risks.’ The school now uses external inspection alongside other tools to indicate areas of development. The school has been learning continuously since its 1998 inspection report and has anticipated many developments. When the new secondary curriculum came out, the school was already committed to personalisation, and it feels it is getting better continually because it caters so specifically for the individual.

Over the last six or seven years, following the Manchester special educational needs review, when many pupils with moderate learning difficulties were placed in mainstream schools, the characteristics of pupils attending Piper Hill have become increasingly more complex. Piper Hill therefore meets the needs of students across a wide continuum. The school never excludes anyone; there is low staff turnover and embedded staff teamwork and loyalty.

The school has very good management systems. There is extensive distributed leadership, giving accountability to more people for aspects of the school. Other priorities have included improving the skills of staff, building capacity and using performance management as a development opportunity for staff. The school has many teams: leadership, tutor group and class teams, for example. Nothing is taken forward by only one person. Everyone is involved, welcomed and listened to; they all have their own strengths and interests. It is a very positive staff. The school is a specialist school in mathematics and computing and shares its expertise with other Manchester schools and the community.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	106
% minority ethnic	35%
Age range	11–19
Post-compulsory	40

Inspection report grades (2007)

Outstanding	23
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

About a third of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties; the rest have severe learning difficulties and, in many cases, complex learning difficulties and challenging behaviour.

Many students come from areas which are socially and economically disadvantaged and 36% are eligible for free school meals.

Ravenscliffe High School, Calderdale

'This is an outstanding school ... because of excellent leadership and management. Teaching and learning are outstanding. As a result, students make remarkable gains in their awareness and in the knowledge and skills they acquire.' (Ofsted, 2007)

Ravenscliffe is the only secondary special school in the local authority. Its campus is leafy and green and is used to its maximum to enhance the curriculum in many ways, including sport and horticulture. The school has the motto 'Meeting individual needs' and it genuinely retains this as the focus of all that it does. It also says that it never promises anything that it cannot deliver. It does, though, promise and deliver high-quality care and education for all its students in ways which suit their individual needs.

The current headteacher, Michael Hirst, has been in post since 1994, but has also taken on the role of director of sport. Because of this the deputy headteacher now fulfils the role of 'partner head' to share leadership and management responsibilities. A major driver in their work is the belief that they are not yet good enough and can always improve further. They do not rest on their laurels but provide a feeling of dynamism and momentum which is tangible on entering the school. A secondary school ethos is promoted, based on mainstream expectations,

and the school sees itself as a part of the continuum of educational provision in Calderdale, not an addition to it. There are very strong and mutually supportive partnerships with a wide range of outside agencies and other schools.

The school has a strong curriculum which includes a wide range of enrichment activities. For students with more complex needs, the school offers extended age-appropriate and personalised sensory activities, when more able peers are taking part in needs-based activities including additional literacy, numeracy and ICT. It promotes students' anticipation and high expectations of their own futures by providing high-quality work-related learning. This is complemented by activities which promote personal and social development, good health and an understanding of citizenship. Thus students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. They appreciate that they are on a continuing journey.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	123
% minority ethnic	35%
Age range	11-19
Post- compulsory	40

Inspection report grades (2008)

Outstanding	24
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

The school caters for a very wide range of needs. All students have a statement of special educational needs to meet their moderate, severe, profound or complex difficulties.

Nine students are looked after by the local authority.

Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service, Shropshire

'The Service provides an excellent quality of education for vulnerable pupils. Pupils in the various centres and hospitals, or those who receive home tuition, are given excellent support so that, wherever possible, they can quickly return to their school.' (Ofsted, 2008)

The Tuition Service in Shropshire is led by Jamie Skeldon, who is not only the headteacher but also a senior officer in the Children and Young People's Services directorate. This symbolises the cohesive nature of Shropshire's alternative education provision, one aim of which is to avoid permanent exclusions. Before pupils are referred to the Tuition Service, schools must show what interventions they have tried, and if they have used permanent exclusion criteria, they have to consult the service before they exclude anyone. The service helps to identify need and mediate in a way which is meaningful for young people. It looks at the learning profile of each pupil or student. The work at the centre is based on the philosophy that if pupils are active learners, behaviour looks after itself. A range of evidence and indicators, together with outstanding inspection reports, show the efficacy of this approach.

What comes through is a strong attention to detail, with high expectations, constant monitoring, and of course a focus on the individual student. They have behaviour

programmes for dealing with bad behaviour and bullying. Attendance at the service has really improved in recent years. They held their own year of reading, with authors, presentations and an in-service day for all. Everybody reads in class. There are bronze, silver and gold reading awards, which lead to prizes to buy books. The headteacher says there is nothing new in this but they do it really consistently. He has changed behaviour through reading.

In terms of providing outreach support to schools, they find that small adjustments in work practices can make a big difference. Some of the children who return to mainstream provision make more progress than those already there. Some former pupils of the Tuition Service have subsequently achieved outstanding results in higher education.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	110
% minority ethnic	Low
Age range	5-16
Post-compulsory	-

Inspection report grades (2008)

Outstanding	21
Good	4
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

The service is based on eight sites. It caters for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, neurological conditions (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders, and so on), learning difficulties (such as dyslexia) and challenging behaviour.

There are also children with wide spectrum autistic disorders, who are confused in the school context. Some pupils are medically unfit to attend school through illness, phobia or pregnancy.

The majority of children come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Woodlands School, Blackpool

'The school is extremely successful because of the consistently high quality of leadership, teaching, care and support. The very positive ethos of the school generates an optimistic view of every individual's ability to reach their potential, regardless of their special needs, and attracts the overwhelming support and confidence of the parents and carers.'
(Ofsted, 2007)

Sam Forde has been the headteacher at Woodlands since 1992 but has been seconded to the local authority since 2008. Lynne Rowling is the acting headteacher. The school was in the doldrums in 1992 with parents choosing to send their children to two other schools in the area dealing with severe learning difficulties. Early priorities were to develop the school's reputation and bring Blackpool children back into the school. The key to getting things moving was getting the right staff, including 'two superb deputies'. As well as building a strong team, the headteacher forged good links with the community and built up resources. It was the second school in Blackpool to achieve Investors in People status. A strong focus on teaching and learning was reflected in high-quality staff training, so they were growing their own leaders and forging an excellent senior leadership team.

Since the beginning, Ofsted has judged the school to be outstanding (or its equivalent) on four occasions, a tribute to the quality of the school's work and ability to sustain excellence. The 11–19 phase of the school will be moving shortly from its current site to become part of a 'new build' for a sixth form college and secondary school, together with the special school. Here it will be a hub of expertise, on a site that will also include a free-standing primary school, with multi-agency teams, health care staff and extended schools staff. Effectively the campus will be a children's centre and school from 0 to 19, with three schools taking children from across the local authority. In his seconded role as senior education officer, the headteacher is playing a leading part in the local authority's planning for the future. The school is a magnet for visitors from across the UK. It is also linked with a Roman Catholic primary school and tries to give children as many experiences beyond school as possible.

School data (2008)

Number on roll	84
% minority ethnic	8%
Age range	2–19
Pre- and post-compulsory	3, 19

Inspection report grades (2008)

Outstanding	24
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Exceptionally low (standards)	1

Needs of pupils

A school for students and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties, and for those on the autistic spectrum.

Students and pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The percentage of those entitled to free school meals is well above the national average and has been rising in recent years.

Most pupils are White British and a small proportion are from other ethnic backgrounds.

Further information



Further information

Ofsted publishes a wide range of reports on aspects of education. The following list features a selection of reports that may be of interest. These reports are available from Ofsted's website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Best practice in self-evaluation: a survey of schools, colleges and local authorities (HMI 2533), July 2006

Curriculum innovation in schools (070097), October 2008

Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools (070048), July 2007

Excellence in cities: managing associated initiatives to raise standards (HMI 2595), December 2005

Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools (070255), October 2008

Improving behaviour and attendance in primary schools (HMI 2477), July 2005

Improving behaviour: lessons learned from HMI monitoring of secondary schools where behaviour had been judged unsatisfactory (HMI 2377), November 2006

Learning from the best... Lessons from the outstanding providers identified by Ofsted in 2006/07 (080127), November 2008

Parents, carers and schools (070018), July 2007

Race equality in education: good practice in schools and local education authorities (HMI 589), November 2005

Reducing exclusions of black pupils from secondary schools: examples of good practice (070240), March 2008

Safeguarding children: the third joint chief inspectors' report on arrangements to safeguard children (080063), July 2008; www.safeguardingchildren.org.uk

Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures (070221), June 2008

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2005/06 (HMI 20060008), November 2006

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006/07 (20070035), October 2007

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08 (080196), November 2008

The deployment, training and development of the wider school workforce (070222), November 2008

The exclusion from school of pupils aged four to seven (090012), June 2009

The impact of integrated services on children and their families in Sure Start children's centres (080253), July 2009

The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools (HMI 2639), July 2006

Twelve outstanding secondary schools (080240), February 2009

Twenty outstanding primary schools (090170), October 2009

Using data, improving schools (070260), August 2008

White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools (070220), July 2008

Advice on special educational needs and disabilities, and materials for teachers, parents and other professionals working with children with special educational needs in England are available at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/sen.

Guidance and advice for parents can be found at: www.parentscentre.gov.uk/specialneeds and www.parentpartnership.org.uk.

For the latest research and statistics, this website provides a link to the Department for Children, Schools and Families gateway: www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway.

Information about inclusion is at: www.inclusion.ngfl.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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