

Aegir Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135362
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	360718
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Page
Headteacher	Karen Gittins
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Gainsborough Educational Village Sweyn Lane, Gainsborough DN21 1PB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Three of these observations were jointly conducted with members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with the Executive Principal, representatives of the governing body, the head of school, a representative of the local authority, students, and staff with particular leadership responsibilities. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at policies, students' work, records, and documents associated with the school's arrangements for safeguarding students. Inspectors scrutinised completed questionnaires from 22 parents and carers, 65 students and 22 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

Is the school making suitable use of national guidance to evaluate the progress made by students, and is this used to inform its evaluation of the quality of teaching?

- How successful is the school in developing students' understanding of the diverse nature of society in the United Kingdom?
- How well does the provision match the different ages, abilities and special educational needs of students?
- How effectively do partnerships with the federated primary school and the co-located academy contribute to outcomes for students and enhance capacity to improve?

Information about the school

Following the closure of two all-age special schools, Aegir opened in a new building in September 2009. It is federated with a special school, Warren Wood, which provides for pupils of primary age and the Aegir inspection was coordinated with that of Warren Wood. In the first year, Aegir catered for a small number of pupils of primary age while the new building for the latter was being completed. There is a single Executive Principal and one governing body for both establishments, and each has a head of school. The school is co-located with an academy. All students have statements of special educational needs that describe moderate, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties or emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; about half of the students have autistic spectrum disorders. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. Almost all students are of White British heritage. There are roughly twice as many boys as girls. Since opening, the school's work has been recognised by The International Schools Award (Intermediate Level), Arts Mark, the Secondary Basic Skills Quality Mark and it has National Healthy Schools status. This is the school's first inspection since it opened.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Aegir Community School's overall effectiveness is good. The transition from the predecessor schools has been very effectively managed by the Executive Principal and the governing body and this is apparent in high parental satisfaction and staff morale. Typically, one parent noted that 'the staff are doing a brilliant job'. The Executive Principal's leadership is outstanding. Her high expectations and clear vision have been effectively communicated to members of the governing body and staff. As a result, there is a strong, shared commitment to doing what is best for the students. Under her leadership, challenging targets have been set, and robust systems for monitoring and evaluating students' progress have been quickly developed. Self-evaluation is good. It is accurate and informs improvement planning well. Development plans drive improvements well, although they are not always specific enough about how actions are intended to secure better outcomes for students or, in the case of community cohesion, how the local community will benefit. However, retrospective impact assessments testify to the success of actions taken. Partnership working enhances the school's capacity to improve, which is good.

Aegir achieves good outcomes for its students because the provision meets their needs well. The great majority of teaching is good or better and so students achieve well. There are many strengths in the teaching and no common weakness that separates the satisfactory from the good or better lessons. Occasionally, small numbers of students are given tasks or resources that do not match their abilities well enough or teaching leads to students being passive rather than active learners. The high-quality accommodation is used effectively to provide a broad range of enjoyable learning experiences. Partnership working with the federated primary school and the co-located academy supplements this well. At present, there is a satisfactory range of external accreditation for students of all abilities in the main subjects and some vocational areas. The school has, rightly, identified this as an area for development.

Students make healthy choices at school, eating and drinking sensibly and taking plenty of exercise. Their understanding of how to keep safe and of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle is well developed. Behaviour is good and occasionally outstanding. Those who find it difficult to behave consistently well improve their ability to do so because the school has an effective system of managing difficult behaviour. Attendance is average. Most students attend well, reflecting their enjoyment of school, but the figure is reduced by absences for medical reasons and a small number of persistent absentees. There is a good range of strategies for encouraging high attendance. Students are well cared for. More than one parent noted that 'the school is like an extended family'. Almost all students feel secure in school and all parents and carers are confident that their youngsters are kept safe. Students are influential. There is an active school council and students are consulted on a wide range of matters. They contributed to selecting the name of the new school and the

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design of the new building. They take increasing responsibility as they mature and learn effectively about the world of work, acquire enterprise skills and improve their basic skills well, so they are well prepared for adult life.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the quality of provision by ensuring that
 - students are actively involved throughout lessons and that they are given tasks that are precisely matched to their abilities
 - effective use is made of real objects to support students' understanding
 - there is a wide range of external accreditation for all areas of the curriculum.
- Strengthen the school's self-evaluation by
 - identifying in the school development plan how actions taken are intended to improve outcomes for students
 - showing in the community cohesion plan how actions are intended to benefit the local community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' good progress is evident from the school's monitoring information, which is based on national guidance. The school uses this to check and evaluate progress made by students, who generally enter the school with attainment that is well below that expected because of the nature and extent of their learning difficulties. Analysis of percentages from different groups, such as boys, girls, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with different needs indicate that in all year groups students achieve equally well. Good learning and progress is also evident in lessons. Good behaviour, students' interest and enthusiasm are important features that contribute to their effective learning. This was particularly evident in a physical education lesson where students' were learning a dance routine from a 'cyber coach'. They persevered with a tricky sequence of movements and cooperated well with the adults, who prompted them physically and verbally. Students also paid careful attention to adults modelling movements at a slower pace so they mastered parts of the sequence, thoroughly enjoying the challenge in the process. Students listen effectively, but occasionally their concentration wanes when they are asked to listen for a relatively long period without being actively involved. Students with behavioural difficulties make effective use of the time-out room if they become unsettled and soon return to class having calmed themselves down. Students with autism are well supported with visual timetables and non-verbal students all have a suitable means of communicating, using signs and symbols. Students with profound and multiple learning difficulties respond well to approaches which stimulate their senses, by vocalising for instance.

Students' personal development is good. They develop their independence skills well, learning to travel safely in the community and taking increasing responsibility for their personal care, for example. Because there are good systems to recognise success, such as house points, students grow in confidence and self-esteem. Relationships between students are good. They understand and accept that there are differences between them and are keen to help one another. Peer mediators help to resolve occasional difficulties.

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Students show considerable empathy for those less fortunate than themselves, select charities to support and generate ideas for fundraising. They contribute to the local community, by collecting litter, for instance. Students are friendly and polite to visitors, and those who have visited as speakers have noted students' interest, curiosity and confidence in questioning them. Visits to theatres, art galleries and participation in clubs and other enrichment activities are effective in developing students' cultural awareness and leisure interests. In religious education lessons and assemblies on a wide variety of topics, students acquire a sound understanding of diversity in the United Kingdom, although they have limited opportunities to meet those from a range of ethnic and religious groups. Students learn about life in countries further afield, such as Ghana, by communicating with students there as part of the International Schools Award.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Staff check students' skills, knowledge and understanding when they begin at the school, and this and subsequent records of what they can do are regularly and carefully checked for accuracy by senior staff. Information about students' prior attainment is generally used well to plan lessons, with a high degree of personalisation in some lessons when individual targets are incorporated into the planning. In the great majority of lessons, tasks are well

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matched to students' needs, but occasionally they are too easy or too difficult for one or two students. This means that their progress is not as good as it is for others in the lesson. The good working relationships that staff have with students are successful in building students' confidence as learners, and staff are skilled in managing students' behaviour. Humour can be enjoyed without any interruptions to learning. Support staff are well briefed and effective in providing the right balance of support and challenge. Higher-attaining students know their personal targets, and teachers give good quality oral and written feedback to them so that they know how well they are doing. Records for students with complex needs are of good quality and accessible because they are mainly photographic. Teachers use a good range of methods suited to students' needs, including stimulating the senses, signing and using objects to represent activities or places. However, the use of objects to support understanding is not yet as widely used as it might be and the school is working on this at present. Staff training has helped to increase skills, for example in using the sensory room or acquiring competence as signers.

The generally good range of learning experiences supports academic and personal development well. For example, there are regular assemblies that help to raise students' awareness of the wider world, such as visits from transport police, the mayor and the Salvation Army. There is choice built into the curriculum for older students, who select from a range of options when they are in Year 11, in preparation for moving to the sixth form. Courses that lead to external accreditation are satisfactory and developing well; all offer a suitable challenge.

Pastoral care is good. Students are well known as individuals and staff show concern for their well-being, privacy and dignity. Students are well supported and supervised. There is good careers guidance, which starts in Year 7 and includes supportive transition planning in later years. Case studies demonstrate that the school intervenes effectively, works well with families and harnesses the support of additional agencies to improve outcomes for students. Support extends to parents and carers in the form of a designated room for their use and family learning opportunities, as well as assistance in completing applications for student benefits.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership roles are widely shared at Aegir. Although some leaders are relatively new to their roles, they are fully involved in the full range of monitoring and evaluation of provision and outcomes. Where weaknesses are noted, a short-term action plan is promptly created, which is usually completed within two weeks or so. In this way, the

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provision is being continually refined and improved. Evaluation of the quality of teaching is largely accurate and well informed by data on students' progress as well as scrutiny of work and lesson observations. Staff share their expertise within the federation, enabling all to enhance their skills, and their strong commitment to improvement is exemplified in the way that they volunteer to put on workshops in their areas of expertise. Expertise is also shared more widely. Evaluations of training provided for academy staff show this was well received, particularly the practical ideas.

There is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and a determination to provide the best for everyone. Links are used effectively to provide inclusion opportunities, which are carefully mapped and monitored for their quality, such as on GCSE courses in the academy, college courses and work experience placements. The school has good information on the performance of the different groups it serves.

Members of the governing body have a good range of skills, experience and expertise relevant to a school of this type. Good governance is demonstrated through the challenge they provide, for example about the costs of resources and whether they represent value for money. Members visit regularly to check at first-hand on an agreed focus and report back to colleagues, and there are secure systems for them to play their part in school development and self-evaluation. The governing body ensures that community cohesion is promoted well. There is a detailed plan for developing community cohesion, based on the school's audit. Because the school is young, this is not yet due for a full evaluation. While the impact of developments on outcomes for students is evident, the plan is not explicit about how the school will evaluate its impact on the local community.

Senior staff and members of the governing body share responsibility for safeguarding. Well-trained individual governors have oversight of child protection and recruitment matters. Arrangements for child protection, including staff training, are good. All risks are thoroughly assessed and suitable steps taken to minimise these. There is rigorous monitoring of all aspects, leading to improvements such as increasing the number of fire marshals.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress in both their academic and personal development. The discrete accommodation is well matched to their ages and needs. It provides them with a more adult environment, including a common room and facilities for learning independence skills such as cooking. Students enjoy their time here and take on considerable responsibility. For instance, they plan and organise the school's summer fayre, maintain an allotment at Warren Wood and have run a cafe in school recently which is to be extended into the local community. External links provide opportunities for students to sample vocational areas, such as horticulture and equine care. The range of accreditation is satisfactory and caters for the full spread of ability. Currently, several students access the full offer in foundation learning, provided in partnership with others, and planning is underway to extend this to more students next year. Students regularly use a local leisure centre and have cards that enable them to extend this to weekends and school holidays. When students enter the sixth form, there are good arrangements to support them and their parents and carers. These help to ensure that they make the right decisions about the next steps and plan systematically for their lives after school. The setting is well led and managed. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the sixth form is carried out in the same way as that for the rest of the school and it informs development planning well.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Although the percentage of questionnaires returned is lower than that found in special schools nationally, the school had recently sent out a similar questionnaire to parents and carers and this had a good number of returns. Respondents are very positive about what the school provides. They are particularly pleased with the teaching provided and the progress their children are making. They are very satisfied with the information they receive about their children's progress and feel well placed to support their children's learning. Parents and carers are unanimous that their children enjoy coming to school. They have high levels of confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe and encourage them to lead a healthy lifestyle. The inspection findings confirm parents' and carers' positive views. A very small number do not agree that the school manages unacceptable behaviour well. Inspectors looked into this concern and found that there are effective strategies to encourage good behaviour and that staff are well trained in how to carry out physical intervention. Instances of the latter are rare.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aegir Community School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 101 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	64	8	36	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	59	9	41	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	45	12	55	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	68	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	41	13	59	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	45	9	41	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	55	9	41	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	45	10	45	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	55	9	41	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	59	9	41	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Aegir Community School, Gainsborough, DN21 1PB

Thank you for making us welcome at your school, for talking to us about school life and showing us some of your work. We enjoyed our visit. We found that yours is a good school. Although it is quite new, the staff and governing body have worked well together to make sure that you have all that you need to make good progress. Your behaviour is good, and those who have found it hard to behave well in the past are improving this now. Almost all of you feel safe at school. You help one another and get on well together too. When you are at school, you make healthy choices, including taking plenty of exercise. We were impressed by the way that you are asked about what you would like. Staff listen to you and so you help in making important decisions, such as the design of the school building. You willingly take on responsibilities, such as raising funds and helping out in the local community.

The teaching is good and we saw that you enjoy almost all of your lessons. The new school building is great - there are special rooms for subjects like food technology and science, so you can do things that might not be possible otherwise. If you need special programmes, like physiotherapy, this is provided. The staff take good care of you. They all make sure that you have the support you need and guide you well in making changes, such as moving from one class to another or preparing to leave school.

Your school is well run by people who want the very best for you. They know exactly what they need to do to make it even better. We have agreed with them that they will make sure that every lesson is at least good. They are steadily increasing the range of certificates that you will get to show what you have achieved. When they make plans, they are going to be clear about how the steps they will take are meant to improve things for you and those in the local community. You can help by attending as often as you can. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector

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