

Columbia Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134184
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	360606
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Michele Crichton

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	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Paula Lockhart
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Oxclose Road Washington Tyne and Wear NE38 7NY
Telephone number	0191 2193860
Fax number	0191 2193865
Email address	Columbia.grange@schools.sunderland.gov.uk

Age group	2–11
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2011
Inspection number	360606

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.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They visited nine lessons and nine teachers were observed. Meetings were held with parents and carers, groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including those relating to self-evaluation, the curriculum, pupils' progress and safeguarding. They also took into account the views of 40 parents and carers who returned questionnaires to the inspection team.

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

- How well pupils progress and achieve.
- How the school meets the needs of all pupils across the school and in different subjects.
- How effectively teaching and assessment help pupils to achieve.

Information about the school

All pupils at Columbia Grange School have a statement of special educational needs. The overwhelming majority of pupils exhibit autistic spectrum disorders and the remaining five per cent have severe learning difficulties. Since the previous inspection, a much higher percentage of pupils attending the school is on the autism spectrum. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Fifteen of the children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The majority of pupils are boys, which is the usual profile for a school of this type.

The school provides extensive support throughout Sunderland to over 600 pupils exhibiting autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained and increased its range of quality marks and has added the Investors in People accreditation.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Columbia Grange is an outstanding school. It provides an outstanding quality of provision and care and ensures predominantly excellent outcomes for all pupils from the exceptional Early Years Foundation Stage through to the time they leave the school.

The school cares for its pupils exceptionally well. It has excellent relationships with parents and carers who are highly appreciative of the school's supportive and caring ethos, with typical comments such as, 'Since my son started this school his progress has been amazing. He's now doing things that we never imagined possible for him'. Additionally, 'This school has been an amazing support to me and my child. Amazing teachers, school and environment.'

As a consequence of the pupils' significant special educational needs and/or disabilities, attainment is low on entry to the school. However, over the course of time, the overwhelming majority of pupils make outstanding progress in their learning from their individual starting points and attainment their rises rapidly. In order to provide for the increasing number of pupils on roll who are on the autism spectrum, staff have further sharpened their teaching and learning practices across the school, which are at least good and frequently outstanding. This is because adults fully understand pupils' specific needs, then plan and teach lessons that meet them. Staff use assessments very effectively to ensure work is appropriate and to support pupils' next steps in learning. Staff have further honed the curriculum to ensure it is interesting, innovative and acutely focused on the distinct needs of the pupils it serves. It is also highly effective in promoting pupils' understanding of community cohesion.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good overall. Pupils feel valued and very safe. They have an excellent understanding of what it means to be healthy and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their outstanding personal development has an enormous impact on their learning. For example, pupils' exemplary behaviour and positive attitudes prepare them extremely well for their next stage of education.

There is outstanding capacity for continued and sustained improvement. The school is very well led and managed by staff, who are committed to raising achievement, and to pupils' continual improvement through constant and rigorous self-evaluation, monitoring and action planning. Leaders and managers are highly effective in sustaining and improving performance. Staff continuously set themselves ambitious measures to improve their practice. However, in their striving to ensure ever higher personalised outcomes for pupils, the governing body sometimes does not ensure that all policies are in place to reflect current good practice.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Fully reflect the wealth of good practice and excellent outcomes for pupils by ensuring that the governing body has all relevant and appropriate policies in place.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils enjoy their learning and their engagement in lessons is outstanding. This is because the pace in lessons is appropriate to the pupils' needs. Work is made fun, learning activities are specifically planned to be the most relevant and meaningful to each pupil and are consistently relevant to their interests and abilities. Pupils make outstanding progress and although attainment is still low when pupils leave school it rises rapidly and significantly from their individual starting points and in relation to their specific needs.

Pupils' excellent behaviour, concentration and enthusiasm for learning, and their developing communication and social understanding, makes classrooms enjoyable and supportive places in which to learn. Focused attention to their interests and attitudes prepares them extremely well for the next stage of their education.

Attendance is good overall. A factor influencing attendance is that younger pupils are more susceptible to levels of cross-infection through sucking or chewing objects they share with other children, even though staff are proactive and extremely diligent to maintain high levels of hygiene. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle through the school's well-planned programme of personal, social and health education. Pupils take part in many fund raising events and raise money for the sustained links Columbia Grange has with other schools and partners in the local community and beyond, reaching across the globe. For example, pupils bake buns and collect money for Red Nose Day and take part in sports days with all Sunderland special schools.

Pupils feel safe and secure in school and know that they are supported well by all the adults with whom they work. Pupils say they can easily turn to an adult 'if I feel sad' and views such as, 'Our teachers are the best thing in this school' are readily agreed with.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is exceptionally high. This is because staff have high expectations of all pupils and the excellent team work and relationships contribute strongly to pupils' successful learning. Additionally, the quality of support from teaching assistants across the school is exceptional. Pupils' needs are known explicitly and staff successfully use strategies to motivate, support and challenge as appropriate, to ensure pupils achieve their best. The highly impressive specialist skills and knowledge of all staff were constantly in evidence in lessons.

The curriculum is purposefully enhanced so that communication and social skills development are skillfully woven into and across all subjects. This means that learning takes place in meaningful, relevant and enjoyable contexts. For example, in one outstanding lesson, pupils thoroughly enjoyed recording each other 'trip trapping across the troll's bridge' using realistic resources, masks and cameras with much language, turn taking and cooperation displayed. A discussion about counting, sequencing, reading for information and recognising feelings had immediately preceded this activity. The routine use of technology in the classroom, with the expectation that all pupils use it with minimum help, provides additional

opportunities for learning, social interaction and independence. These improvements to teaching and the curriculum have influenced pupils' progress significantly.

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

Care, guidance and support are of the highest quality. A strong caring, supportive ethos pervades the whole school. The transitional arrangements as the pupils move into and from the Early Years Foundation Stage and through the school are excellent; thus ensuring there is continuity and minimal disruption to pupils. Additionally, the school works exceptionally well with external agencies and partners to provide targeted support to pupils and their families. The whole process is smooth, personal and noteworthy.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Columbia Grange staff are relentless in their motivation to secure excellence for all pupils and this ambition is demonstrated by the embedded and shared vision they have for the school. This drive for excellence is viewed as everyone's responsibility.

There is constant scrutiny of whole-school practice, highly effective partnerships with parents and carers and extensive and sustained partnership links both locally and globally. An indication of the highly positive impact of partnerships can be seen, for example, through the outreach service which provides support and challenge to a range of provisions. Here, well-established systems are in place to monitor the quality of service provided. This means, for example, that there is quicker and more accurate identification of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, enabling them to access provision much earlier. There are regular, and many, visitors to the school, workshops and conferences for parents, carers and professional links. These factors also contribute to the outstanding community cohesion.

A strong commitment to the individual lies at the heart of the school's ethos and it gives high priority to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities. Outcomes are carefully and systematically monitored to ensure that there is no discrimination and all pupils achieve and progress equally positively.

The governing body discharges its statutory responsibilities conscientiously. Safeguarding is addressed dutifully; statutory requirements are met and are in accordance with local authority protocols. The school integrates issues about safety and safeguarding effectively into the curriculum so that pupils have the best understanding possible of how to keep themselves safe. However, the governing body does not ensure that all school policies are kept up-to-date and reflect current good practice.

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

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Welfare, learning and fun are paramount in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children develop exceptionally well because every opportunity is made to enhance communication and social skills in meaningful ways. For example, there are regular visits in the local community and to nearby shops. There is a good balance and wide range of free choice and guided activities. Outstanding attention is given to every aspects of children's personal development. There are high expectations of children and staff persist with discussions and responses until a high standard of communication is reached. Teaching maintains a good pace and resources are engaging. Staff ensure that the environment is calm but also a delightful place to learn. For example, even though some children may demonstrate challenging behaviour at times, staff remain calm and consistent in their approach. Other children are not disrupted by events and learning continues smoothly because all are well supported by an expert team who work cohesively together.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Children's well-being and care arrangements are exceptionally well met as demonstrated in practice and planning for continuous improvement. All staff place high aspirations of themselves and of all the children they work with. Staff are very well trained and extremely experienced as this is readily displayed in the classroom. Team work is highly impressive.

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

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

A high proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Those who did were extremely positive about the school's provision and the outcomes it achieves. The quality of teaching, pupils' particular needs being met, feeling safe and the quality of leadership and management were rated particularly positively. The findings of the inspection team concur with these views. Parents were glowing in their praise for the school. This is captured in the comment, 'This school changed my life. They are the best school for meeting the needs of special needs children. They are amazing at their jobs and should be praised to the highest for it from cleaners to the teachers to the head. Amazing!' A very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns but inspection findings support the positive views of the overwhelming majority.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Columbia Grange 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 33 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 82 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	86	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	94	2	6	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	83	6	17	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	71	9	26	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	89	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	83	6	17	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	83	6	17	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)	30	86	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	89	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	80	6	17	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	83	5	14	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	32	91	3	9	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	83	5	14	1	3	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.



21 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Columbia Grange School, Washington, NE38 7NY

Thank you for making both inspectors so welcome when we visited your school recently. Even though it was Red Nose Day, everyone was still busy learning but also having lots of fun. We both had discussions with pupils in the school and really enjoyed our time with you. It was very clear that from what you said and the responses from your parents and carers in their questionnaires that you are happy at school, feel safe and behave very well.

Virtually everything in Columbia Grange is outstanding and this is from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to the time when you leave the school. We both thought that the work you did and how well you are learning is exceptional. Your teachers and other adults enjoy working with you and they are constantly thinking of ways to make your learning better and better. There is something that could be improved though. The governors like working with you so much in school that they occasionally forget to keep policies up-to-date and write things down.

Yours sincerely

Michele Crichton

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.