

The Centre School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135695
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	366782
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Thompson HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Harradine
Headteacher	Tony Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2009
School address	High Street Cottenham, Cambridge CB24 8UA
Telephone number	01954 288789
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors over two days. Fourteen lessons and parts of lessons, taught by eight different teachers and instructors, were observed. The inspector met with staff and students, a member of the governing body and a representative from the local authority, and carried out three telephone interviews with parents and carers of students at the school. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at students' work and a range of documentation including tracking of students' progress, important policies and the school development plan. In addition, the inspector looked at the responses from 29 parent and carer questionnaires sent out by the school in January 2011.

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

- The rates of progress made by students and the level of challenge in targets set for individual students and the school.
- The consistency of behaviour management across the school and if this has helped students to take more responsibility for their own behaviour than has been evident at the school previously.
- The quality of teaching and whether inadequate teaching has been eliminated.
- The use of effective monitoring and evaluation systems to support improvement in the quality of education on offer to students and help to eradicate any inequalities.

Information about the school

The Centre School is federated with Cottenham Village College and shares a site with this mainstream secondary school. All students have statements of special educational needs with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties identified as their primary need. Approximately one fifth are known to be eligible for free school meals and a few students are looked after by the local authority. Nearly all students are White British and many travel long distances to attend the school. At the time of the last inspection the school required special measures.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Centre School offers a satisfactory standard of education. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Students are making at least satisfactory progress due to considerable improvements in teaching, and good focused support to encourage better attendance and behaviour. A rapidly increasing proportion of students are making good progress, particularly in communication, reading, mathematics and science. Fewer students are making good progress in writing than in the other areas. Not enough opportunities are found for writing across the curriculum and at times the approaches used to teach and encourage reading are not consistent. During the inspection students were keen to tell the inspector about the improvements in their reading and how additional reading support has made a considerable difference to them accessing other lessons. Staff have a growing understanding of the difference between students' levels of understanding due to missed education and where students have specific difficulties with learning. This helps them to plan effectively to meet students' needs.

Students behave reasonably well most of the time and are far more engaged in learning than they were in the past. There are good examples of students supporting each other, although this is not wide spread. Teachers are more confident to use practical and imaginative activities because students behave more appropriately and this makes lessons more interesting. Lessons usually progress at a reasonable pace but there is not always enough time given to check if students have understood new concepts. Most students enjoy school and benefit from the appropriate balance between more academic subjects and vocational opportunities. A rapidly growing number of students attend very regularly. There are still a few students who do not attend regularly enough and this prevents them from making expected progress.

The leadership team has coordinated support across the federation very effectively. Coaching and support offered to teachers from staff at the mainstream school have been a strong contributor to the rapid improvements in lessons. Access to specialist staff and facilities in the mainstream school has also helped to broaden the curriculum. The staff team have worked hard to improve practice. They use careful tracking and evaluation to identify when students are not making acceptable rates of progress. This information leads to swift action being taken and has helped the school to improve considerably over the last year. The governing body has offered good challenge and has established robust systems of accountability based upon the outcomes for students. Improvement in the quality of education on offer at the school based on tight structures and monitoring and evaluation systems demonstrate that the school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

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Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Building on the considerable improvements in teaching over the last year, ensure that in lessons:
 - teachers consistently provide opportunities for students to speak and respond so that staff can check their understanding more effectively
 - teachers consistently give sufficient time for students to review and rehearse the learning that has taken place.
- Ensure approaches to the teaching of literacy are consistently applied by all staff by sharing strategies and offering more training for all staff in teaching reading and writing, especially for students who struggle with this area.
- Develop more imaginative and creative ways to encourage students to use and develop their writing skills so that opportunities become embedded across the curriculum.
- Provide more opportunities for students to take on responsibility for supporting each other, including supporting the induction of new students, and to make more of a contribution to the school community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students start at the school at levels that are below those expected for their age. Attainment is low but the progress they make while at the school is improving and now the vast majority make satisfactory progress or better. The only group who are making less than satisfactory progress are the few who do not attend regularly. By using effective strategies to find out what students already know, staff identify students' specific needs soon after they arrive at the school. Many students have had disrupted education experiences and any gaps in their earlier learning are identified. Planned additional support is put into place swiftly and evaluated regularly so that suitable changes can be made to help students make progress at an increasingly rapid rate. This is successful when students attend regularly. During lessons students are increasingly engaged in their learning and motivated by success in meeting their chosen targets. Where teachers ensure that there is time throughout the lesson to check what students understand and adapt the lesson accordingly, they make better progress. Students are also gaining increasing levels of accreditation, particularly in functional skills. The range of curriculum options are all supported by a variety of accreditation which students find motivating and which help to establish suitable pathways to future education, employment or training. Success for the current Year 11 students demonstrates that the vast majority have made satisfactory progress over the last year and some have made good progress. Students feel safe at school because there is a consistent and supportive response from staff to any inappropriate behaviour. At times students are less engaged in their learning and instances of inappropriate behaviour occur, but staff manage this well and it usually creates minimal disruption for others. Occasions of inappropriate behaviour are decreasing across the school and individuals learn to take more responsibility for their own behaviour over time.

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Over the last year the ethos of the school has changed as a more cohesive approach from staff has been established. Students are keen to celebrate their achievements and respond well to praise and rewards. This supports students' spiritual, moral and social development and increasingly the students are becoming more aware of different cultures and beliefs. Opportunities for students to support each other and make a useful contribution to the school have increased, but there are some missed opportunities to provide students with higher levels of responsibility within the school community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

Teaching is satisfactory and a rapidly increasing amount of teaching is good. This demonstrates considerable improvement over the last year. Teachers use information about students' levels of understanding to plan work so that it provides a good level of challenge for those with differing abilities. This helps to keep students motivated and they respond well to success. Teachers' skill in asking suitable questions in lessons have improved considerably, but at times there is too much input from teachers and less opportunity for students to discuss and respond. Teachers in many lessons successfully build upon the interests of students to engage them in other subjects. There are opportunities for students to collaborate in some lessons but these are not frequent. Staff and student relationships are good and low-key reminders about behaviour help to keep an orderly atmosphere where learning can take place.

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

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The school is responsive to students' interests and abilities and creates a range of personalised programmes. This includes offering home tuition to occasional students who find attending school difficult. The curriculum provides reasonable breadth and increasing access to externally recognised awards and examinations. Work within the federation has enabled a wider range of subjects to be taught and better use of time because there is less travelling to external venues. There is good emphasis on working in partnership with a range of providers so that students have access to a range of different types of work experience and vocational opportunities. Students usually respond extremely well in these situations. Regular cross-curriculum cultural days provide good opportunities for students to learn together in interesting and exciting ways. Similarly, visitors to the school who have exceptional skills and interesting experiences further enhance students' understanding of the world.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff at the school ensure that they get to know students well and are very active in ensuring that all students receive the support they need to attend school regularly and behave more appropriately. Improvements in both these areas are testament to the success of the approaches being used. Detailed record keeping means that staff can offer help to both the students and their families quickly. Strong relationships are forged and students know where they can get the support they need. Students are involved in setting their own targets and this has helped them understand the progress they are making. These areas are led and managed well, and all staff take an active role in ensuring students have the guidance they need to improve at school or move on to their next placement successfully.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

A persistent drive to raise the standard of education and, in particular, improve teaching has enabled the school to improve so that students are making satisfactory progress both academically and socially. As a result, students have much better chances for success in their future lives. Close attention to monitoring and careful evaluation have enabled staff throughout the school to recognise where areas need improving and where they are having more success. This has helped to shape developments. The focus on improving the breadth of the curriculum, while keeping a strong focus on improving basic skills in literacy and numeracy, has led to improving equality of opportunity which is now satisfactory. A range of actions planned and implemented by the school are successfully helping to develop a sense of community cohesion, including being involved in local area events and sports challenges with other schools.

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Close attention is given to safeguarding students and systems are robust. Good support and guidance help to ensure that any actions taken are followed up and benefit the students. The school works very effectively with other partners to provide a cohesive package of support for students according to their need and experiences.

Strong leadership and management are supported well by a governing body whose members are not only supportive of the school but also well equipped to ask challenging questions. Many members act as champions for the students and ensure that their needs are met appropriately.

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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

As this inspection was carried out at very short notice no parental questionnaires were sent out. The school has recently surveyed the opinions of parents and carers about the school, and in particular about the effectiveness of the meetings carried out at students' homes. Nearly all responses about students' progress since attending the school were positive. Parents and carers telephoned by the inspector were also extremely positive about the support they receive from the school and they were all pleased with the progress their child is making. Particularly positive comments focused on how approachable staff at the school are, and how parents and carers are kept informed about successes as well as when students have found behaving difficult. They all commented that their child was now happy to attend school and this was the first time following very difficult educational experiences.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



30 June 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Centre School, Cottenham, CB24 8UA

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and special thanks to those of you who took time to talk to me. It has been a pleasure to meet you throughout the year and observe your progress. At the last full inspection, The Centre School was found to be inadequate and you were not able to make enough progress. Your school has improved considerably and is now providing you with a satisfactory level of education.

You are all making at least satisfactory progress and an increasing number of you are making good progress. You are rightly proud of the progress you are making, particularly in reading. I have asked teachers to help you with this in all your different lessons. Many of you are reluctant to write or find it difficult and I have asked teachers to find more interesting purposes for writing so that you can practise and develop your skills.

Teachers have a better understanding about your previous learning and plan interesting lessons where you are encouraged to do your best. Relationships between you and the staff are positive and there is usually a calm, purposeful atmosphere in lessons. I have asked teachers to give you more opportunities to talk about what you know and to explore how much you understand more frequently throughout the lessons.

I was impressed by the examples I saw of you supporting each other and sharing what you had learnt while at the school. I have asked that you be given more responsibilities to support each other, including when new students arrive, and that you can offer even more ideas for improving the school community.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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