

Springwell Dene School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108881
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	377842
Inspection dates	28–29 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Short
Headteacher	Graeme Shillinglaw
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, and one additional inspector. The inspectors observed thirteen part-lessons, which involved a total of 10 teachers. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings held with members of the senior leadership team and the Chair of the Governing Body. Other informal discussions were held with staff and a significant number of students during lessons and around the school. Inspectors also read 24 inspection questionnaires returned by parents or carers, in addition to considering the views of those staff and students who completed separate questionnaires.

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

- The rate of students' progress during their time at the school.
- The target-setting process used within the school, including the involvement of students.
- The impact of the curricular provision on students' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour.
- The coherence of leadership and management, at all levels, on improving provision and raising students' attainment.

Information about the school

Springwell Dene School is a special school with specialist status for behaviour. The school, which is much smaller than the average sized secondary school, offers specialist teaching and support for a small number of secondary-age students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; normally from within its local authority area. Before starting at the school, all the students have a prior record of severely disrupted education due to a combination of poor attendance and behaviour, which also accounts for the above-average movement into and out of the school. All the students have a statement of special educational needs and all are of White British heritage. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is almost four times the national average. The school has gained a number of national and local awards, among the most significant of which are its specialist status for behaviour, Healthy School status, Sportsmark, Artsmark, Sustainable Schools, and a local authority 14 – 19 silver award.

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

Springwell Dene School provides an outstanding and continually improving standard of education for its students.

All the students have a background of severely disrupted education because of personal issues relating primarily to poor attendance and behaviour in their previous schools. From a very low start point, the students' progress is rapid. However, there remains a small minority whose regular attendance is still not reaching an acceptable level, with senior leaders and managers acutely aware that further and on-going support for these students and their families is required. Staff are also aware that limitations shown by some students to achieve even better results is due to an inability to write more extensively in most subjects than they currently do.

The quality of personal, social and academic support provided by staff is outstanding, and is highly praised by both students and their parents or carers. Enjoyment levels are very high because of the varied but challenging curricular opportunities provided for all students and the consistently high-quality teaching that takes accurate account of the students' varied intellectual, emotional and social needs.

Senior leaders and managers have an exceptionally good understanding of what needs to be done in order to help all students achieve a measure of personal success and some form of national accreditation. There is a shared vision for further improvements, which underpins the work of all in the school. Morale among staff and students is very high because they feel valued and involved in the life of the school.

The school has successfully maintained and improved upon its past successes, particularly since its previous inspection. Overall, therefore, the school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to tackle, as robustly as possible, the poor attendance of a small minority of students by:
 - instigating prompt and varied actions to get non-attendees back into school as quickly as possible
 - developing further support strategies with parents, carers and the local authority, which addresses the root cause of persistent non-attendance.

- Provide further whole-school curricular opportunities to develop the students' extended writing skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

When they join the school, usually between the ages of 11 and 14, the students generally have very low attainment as a result of the behaviour and attendance problems related to their special educational needs. However, the students rapidly gain in confidence and motivation as they settle into the school environment. In lessons, the students make excellent efforts in response to teaching that encourages a positive work ethic within a framework of activities that are tailored well to meet their needs. In many subjects, such as art, music and physical education, talents are recognised, cherished and skilfully developed. The students take great pride in their achievements. School-generated data show that for those leaving the school over the last few years, whilst their attainment remained low in comparison with national standards, progress has been impressive and improving from year-on-year. In some subjects, GCSE results in 2011 were very strong; for example, in mathematics, of the 12 students in the year group, eight achieved grade C, two had lower grades and two had alternative certification. In some other subjects, such as art, many students have exceeded their original predictions by a considerable margin. The school is careful to ensure appropriate certification for all courses so that students gain credit for their success. Due to the backlog of underachievement in literacy prior to joining the school, some students find extended writing a challenge, but make serious efforts to develop it.

Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. Students are keen for personal success and make a determined effort with their work. The students generally get on very well with one another and their relationships with staff are excellent. Visitors are welcomed into the school and the students are eager to present themselves and the school in the best possible light. Students and their parents or carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school being a safe place to be; where students know how to take care of themselves and one another.

There is high and enthusiastic take-up of sporting activities, and students enjoy the healthy lunches that are available. Through the health education provision, they have an excellent understanding of how to stay fit, and stay clear of harmful activities. Through the school council, representatives can debate issues of school life and have opportunities to influence change. The several whole-school circle time gatherings each day engender a sense of collective identity, in which the students relish the opportunity to make a contribution to the life of the school. Though attendance is low, the great majority of students show much stronger attendance than seen in their previous schools. Although the school and the educational welfare officer can demonstrate many cases where persistent poor attendance has been addressed successfully, there is still a small minority whose attendance is a cause for concern. On-going support for these students from the school and the local authority is beginning to make a difference to the overall attendance rate, which for the overwhelming majority is at least average. Senior leaders and managers are aware that even greater effort is needed to link with parents and carers of this very small

number of poor attendees to ensure a more regular attendance at school. Notwithstanding this, students are effectively preparing themselves for the next stages of education or work. The wholesome school ethos, the mature and considerate social interchange, and the evidence of vibrant endeavour in outdoor, musical, artistic and wider pursuits demonstrate students' excellent personal development.

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	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	1
The extent to which pupils develop [workplace and other skills]/[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	1

How effective is the provision?

The consistency in the quality of teaching throughout the school makes a significant contribution to the students' outstanding progress. Lessons are planned well to ensure that the students engage in a varied range of suitable learning activities, which help maintain a good pace to their learning. This applies, in particular, to the hands-on practical tasks that characterise a good proportion of the work in the school. Teachers are adept at using a range of resources, which engage, enthuse and enhance the students' desire to get actively involved in their learning. The teachers' organisation and management of the students in lessons works very effectively, and staff know their learning, behavioural and emotional needs exceptionally well; this makes a significant contribution to the students' outstanding behaviour throughout the school. All staff have very good subject knowledge, relative to the age and needs of the students. The recording of students' progress is accurate and used effectively to build upon prior learning. Target-setting is based on a detailed and thorough analysis of the students' progress as they move through the school and, as a result, they are keenly aware of what they are expected to achieve and are suitably motivated to work towards these shared goals. The working relationships in lessons are exceptionally strong and characterised by encouragement to participate in work activities, within the bounds of a trusting and reassuring work ethos. Teachers' marking is both consistent and helpful to students. In the best examples, teachers use a skilful combination of praise and areas for future improvements. However, some poorly presented student work is not always sufficiently challenged, as an aid to them taking greater pride in their work.

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

The curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for students to learn how to learn, and to take increasing responsibility for their own progress. Appropriate time is given to lessons that are specific to basic skills development in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The broader curriculum includes a wealth of enrichment and optional programmes with which students engage with exceptional zeal and determination. Students are counselled well on the choice of activities, and the school is diligent in ensuring accreditation at appropriate levels for all the courses that older students follow. Personal, social and health education addresses an agenda of very pertinent issues and is received well by students.

Staff at all levels have an exceptionally good understanding of the students’ learning needs, and the circumstances of their life outside school which can affect their behaviour and attitudes to attending school on a regular basis. Through the tutor system and whole-school circle time, and in all interactions between staff and students, there is outstandingly well-targeted support and celebrations of the students’ many personal successes. The students’ personal development and behaviour are very closely monitored and there is a very motivating rewards system to promote positive attitudes and behaviour. Many students attest to the ‘fantastic help and encouragement’ that the school provides for them.

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?

Senior leaders and managers have successfully communicated and shared with all staff their vision for continuing improvements throughout the school. As a result, the staff and governing body maintain a very positive outlook about the potential of the students to achieve above or well above the expectations that many started with at the school. The extent to which senior leaders and managers engage in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school is both robust and well-directed, which means that they know very clearly what the overall quality of teaching is like, and where individual staff can make further improvements as an aid to helping the students achieve even better results. However, the staff and governing body are not just content with past achievements, but continue to focus on developing further the many outstanding areas, in addition to developing new aspects that enhance the overall quality of education. For example, the continuing professional development outreach work with many local authority primary, special and secondary schools, in addition to regular links with a college of further education has specifically benefitted both students and staff; the latter resulting in all students leaving the school at the end of Year 11 entering some form of employment, training or further education.

The governing body gives good quality support to the school, and is developing an effective range of strategies to engage further in the monitoring and evaluation of

the quality of provision for all students. The quality of the school’s links with external partners and parents or carers makes a significant contribution to the quality of education on offer, and to the all-round support provided for every student. This, in turn, is making a difference to the attitudes and behaviour of the overwhelming majority of students who attend the school.

The school has successfully tackled prejudice and discrimination through positive actions that are helping the students to appreciate their own and others’ differences. All reasonable actions are taken to safeguard the students, and all regulations relating to appropriate checks on adults who work in the school meet requirements. The school presents itself as a very cohesive community. The links with different local communities, including schools, are very strong. Additional school-based activities, which include African drumming and a visit from a Zulu dance group, are helping the students to appreciate other cultures. A recent trip to France further widened the opportunity for some students to experience a different style of living from that which they know in their own home area.

These are the grades for the 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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Around 38% of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. They are very positive about the quality of education provided for their children. A very small number took the opportunity to write some additional comments and, overwhelmingly, these were supportive and praised the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Springwell Dene 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 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 61 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	17	71	7	29	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	67	6	25	2	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	92	2	8	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	75	5	21	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	79	5	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	75	6	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	63	9	38	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)	16	67	8	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	83	4	17	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	71	6	25	1	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	75	5	21	1	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	83	3	13	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	79	5	21	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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.



26 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Springwell Dene School, Sunderland SR3 4EE

Thank you for the very positive attitudes you showed to me and my colleague when we recently visited your school. You will know that during the two days we were in school, we spoke with almost everyone at some point to see what you thought about attending Springwell Dene School and, more importantly, how well you are doing in your work. I hope the headlines below help you and your parents and carers to understand how positively the inspectors viewed your school.

- The school provides you with an outstanding and continually improving standard of education.
- Although you start at the school with very low standards, and often a background of poor attendance and behaviour from your previous school, almost all of you make rapid progress in your learning. However, because of these previous problems, some of you lack the confidence and ability to write at length in a number of your subjects. Also, there is still a small number of you who still do not attend school regularly enough.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school staff is outstanding, and this clearly encourages you to behave very positively in all that you do in school.
- Your teachers plan lessons that help you to achieve very well, and this is helping the older students, in particular, to gain some creditable passes in national GCSE examinations and other award courses.
- Your senior teachers and the governing body have set about making the school even better by getting all of you as involved as possible in almost every aspect of school life.

You should rightly be proud of your many personal and academic achievements, but keep working hard, attending school regularly and responding to your teachers in a way that you, your parents and carers, would be proud to talk about.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector

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