

Carlton Digby School

61 Digby Avenue, Mapperley, Nottingham, NG3 6DS

Inspection dates

21–22 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Some of the school's previously good practices have slipped. This is due to staffing difficulties and the amount of the leaders' time taken up by the construction and move to the new building.
- Too many management responsibilities are held by the senior staff, who struggle to fulfil them all. Staff at other levels do not have enough responsibility for supporting the school's improvement and developing their own leadership skills.
- The school's systems for checking on and improving teaching are not regularly used to improve the quality of teaching further.
- The teaching of sounds and letters (phonics) to help pupils learn to read is not consistent across the school or the methods up-to-date.
- The governing body does not always question the school sufficiently deeply, ensure that its systems are working effectively, or check whether spending decisions are having a positive result on pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils achieve well due to some good and excellent teaching, the therapists' high-quality input, and the rich, interesting range of activities and subjects provided.
- Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent.
- Pupils' behaviour is well managed by the staff, and is good.
- The sixth form is good and pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives.
- The care and support given to pupils and their families are outstanding.
- Parents and carers are very happy with the school and their children's progress.
- Staff are proud to work at the school and are ambitious for the pupils' future lives.
- The senior leaders understand what the school needs to do to improve. Since the move, they have already started to put developments and improvements into place.

Information about this inspection

- Seven teachers, a physiotherapist, and a speech and language therapist were observed teaching nine lessons. Six of these were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and head of the lower school. A meeting was held with four representatives of the governing body, and with a representative of the local authority. Informal discussions were held with pupils, and a discussion was held with a parent.
- Inspectors reviewed many documents, including those relating to pupils' behaviour and progress, school self-evaluation and improvement, curriculum planning, governance and keeping pupils safe.
- Inspectors took account of the school's recent survey of parents' and carers' views. There were insufficient responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire for parents) to be reported. Twenty-three completed staff inspection questionnaires were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Emly

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Carlton Digby School provides for pupils with very wide-ranging needs. The largest groups of pupils have severe learning difficulties (about one third), autistic spectrum disorder (about one quarter), and profound and multiple learning difficulties (about one fifth). Some have moderate learning difficulties, and others have complex medical needs. Most pupils have various combinations of these needs.
- All pupils have statements of special educational needs.
- Around one third of the pupils are girls and two thirds are boys, which is typical for schools of this type.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is much lower than average.
- A much higher proportion of pupils than is usually found are looked after, and have regular social services' involvement.
- A much higher proportion of pupils than average are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school receives the pupil premium for these pupils. This is an additional sum of money provided by the government to support the achievement of particular groups of pupils at risk of underachieving.
- The school moved into newly built premises in September 2012, but some areas of the building are not yet in use.
- The school has been affected by some long-term staff absence over the past year.
- The school is organised into eight mixed-aged classes. The small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in mixed-aged classes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all is good and more outstanding by:
 - rigorously implementing the new teachers' appraisal system
 - providing training for staff on observing lessons, developing excellence in teaching and the teaching of literacy skills
 - identifying particular strengths and weaknesses in teaching, enabling the best practice to be shared and weaker elements to be systematically reviewed and improved.
- Improve leadership and management by supporting staff to contribute more to the leadership and management of the school and to develop their own leadership capability.
- Improve governance so that it:
 - ensures the school's practices, procedures and requirements are up-to-date and running effectively
 - rigorously holds the school to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
 - carefully checks that the school's decisions and use of finances are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement and wellbeing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school at different ages. Their attainment on entry is low due to their complex needs. Each pupil's next steps for learning in key subjects are outlined in an extensive individual education plan. Progress towards these is carefully recorded. These records show that most individual pupils achieve well, taking all their circumstances into consideration.
- Pupils' good progress is not only due to class teaching but also to the high-quality support for their therapy needs and their emotional, social and physical wellbeing. It is also supported very well by the engaging way that subjects and activities are brought together into broad themes, and by whole-school events which reinforce learning very effectively.
- The school sets pupils demanding targets based on the expectation that they will achieve more than average for their age and ability. Comparisons with national information over the last three years show that, at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4, pupils generally achieve these targets. The picture is improving. In July 2012, all pupils in these age groups met their high-level targets.
- Some individuals throughout the school achieve exceptionally well. Records show that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage develop their ability to learn and make good progress. Last year, for example, one child moved to mainstream school after making exceptional progress. Pupils in the sixth form, who often join late in their school careers, make good progress. Both the school and parents and carers note that pupils who join Carlton Digby from mainstream schools often make much more rapid progress than previously.
- Where individual pupils do not make expected progress, the school investigates possible reasons. A significant number of pupils experience family and social difficulties which often severely disrupt their learning and education. A range of support provided for their learning and wellbeing is usually successful in improving achievement.
- The extra money derived from the pupil premium is used effectively to provide additional staff and activities such as music therapy. Data show that nearly half of the pupils eligible for the pupil premium make more progress than expected.
- Pupils' progress is analysed and compared with other schools' data annually by an external organisation. This shows that almost all pupils make at least expected progress over a range of subjects, but not as many as should do make exceptional progress. The school has identified a technical error resulting in this information not reflecting their other convincing evidence of pupils' good progress, and is currently putting this situation right.
- Comparison of data on achievement of different cohorts and groups is of limited value because of the low numbers within each group. Nevertheless, indications are that boys and girls in all age groups, from all backgrounds, heritages and family circumstances, including being looked after by the local authority, make similar progress.
- Pupils of different needs achieve similarly well. For example, pupils with moderate learning difficulties learn to read and write, use money, and achieve externally accredited awards. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder learn to manage their own anxieties and behaviour, and develop skills appropriate to their ability. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties show increased awareness and motivation to communicate and respond, such as during group communication games.

- Throughout the school, pupils make good progress in communication and numeracy. They learn to talk, and to recognise objects, use symbols and understand signing. Some read and write simple texts. Younger pupils learn to count objects and recognise numerals, while older pupils demonstrate more advanced skills, such as making a tally chart of their class' responses.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils' achievement is supported very well by the high-quality work of other adults. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 enjoy 'play and learn' sessions run by support staff. These give them opportunities to socialise and learn with children from the local community. Therapists lead group sessions focused on particular needs. Two excellent examples observed were the 'Theatre of Possibilities' communication session for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and a motor learning session for pupils with physical disabilities.
- Where class teaching is most effective, teachers prepare activities and resources that suit each pupil, for example, for those that need symbols to communicate and understand the structure of the day, and for those that can read words. They pitch questions at different levels to check on pupils' understanding and to extend or support their responses. Pupils are given constant feedback and clear praise to encourage their learning. Teaching assistants use their initiative to support individuals or small groups to concentrate and learn.
- The best lessons are well planned and show clear learning targets for each pupil, based on an assessment of their next steps for learning. These tie-in precisely with their individual education plans, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. Time is given for pupils to reflect on whether they have succeeded in their tasks.
- Musical cues and song are often used to signal a particular activity. Light, colour, darkness and movement are used very well with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, as seen in an outstanding communication and interaction session led by speech therapists. In this, pupils' deliberate communications were repeated back by staff to encourage more. In all these effective lessons, pupils' positive attitudes, careful listening and behaviour are exemplary.
- While teaching is typically good, not enough is outstanding and there is some practice that requires improvement. Systems to check on and improve teaching were not fully operational last year and staff absence has contributed to a dip in the quality of some class teaching. Pupils' achievement has not been compromised, due to the effectiveness of other adults' work and the engaging curriculum.
- There are common features in lessons that fall short of the quality of the best. Resources and activities are not always well enough tailored to suit all individuals in the group. Consequently, these pupils are not sufficiently involved and do not learn as much as they could. Pupils are often given warm praise, but not always the guidance to help them repeat or build on their achievement. Similarly, questioning can be limited or pupils are not given enough time to respond. While pupils of all ages learn to read, teachers do not always use the most up-to-date methods for linking letters and sounds.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Nearly half of the parents and carers responded to the school's questionnaire that was issued just before the inspection. All agreed that their children are happy and feel safe at Carlton Digby.

One parent, whose child moved to Carlton Digby from mainstream, said: 'I couldn't wish for a better school team. All staff are worth their weight in gold.' She says that she now never worries about her child when he is at school.

- Staff show very high levels of care and concern for each pupil, and spend considerable time supporting their physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Relationships with pupils are outstanding, which helps the staff to be sensitive to small changes in their wellbeing, and to provide speedy support if necessary.
- Pupils are mainly friendly and tolerant of each other and new adults. More-able pupils are curious and polite. For example, one young man asked the inspector, 'Are you Ofsted?', while smiling broadly and holding out his hand for a handshake.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons are usually good. Where teaching is at its best, they are excellent. In these lessons, pupils try very hard to succeed. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were observed striving to hold a large plastic sheet, and more-able pupils were heard asking, 'What level am I at now?' after being praised for their success. Where teaching is less effective, pupils can become distracted and their behaviour and concentration sometimes deteriorate.
- Staff, parents and carers express very few concerns about pupils' behaviour. A number of pupils have particularly challenging behaviours associated with their difficulties. They are mostly very well managed by staff, following well-defined procedures. Detailed records show that challenging behaviour reduces quickly as a result of the school's strategies. Where there is particular concern about a pupil's behaviour or wellbeing, staff are quick to involve outside specialists.
- There are very few deliberately anti-social incidents. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. The topics of safety and bullying are covered in lessons such as personal, social and health education, food technology and when pupils are learning in the community. Almost all staff, parents and carers say discriminatory behaviour is rare and dealt with well if it occurs.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The school's leaders recognise that the school has gone through a 'rough patch' as more time than expected was spent on arrangements for the build and move to the long-awaited new school. Additionally, there has been considerable long-term staff illness, which is still ongoing. One post in the senior leadership team has been vacant for most of this year, with a knock-on effect on the remaining leaders. Consequently, some of the school's routine systems and practices have slipped and require improvement.
 - Staff, leaders and managers are ambitious for the school, for pupils' future lives and for the whole school community's wellbeing, including the staff's. All pupils, regardless of their ability, disability, circumstances, gender or ethnicity are given equal opportunities for learning. Parents and carers are regularly consulted and are very happy with the school's work and its new accommodation.
 - School self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders know what aspects need improvement to get back to, and beyond, their previously good position. They also have numerous plans for developments, such as changes to the sixth form curriculum and more joint working with other schools. Some of these have already been implemented this term.
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- Pupils' achievement has improved in the past year since class staff have taken greater responsibility for tracking progress and setting targets. Overall, though, leadership and management responsibilities are not well-enough spread throughout the school. Staff do not take enough responsibility for leading improvements and for performance in their subjects, or for developing their skills and capacity as future leaders and managers.
 - Senior leaders take appropriate action to eradicate any obvious underperformance in teaching. However, the systems for checking on and improving teaching, particularly in supporting the development of outstanding practice, are not effective enough. Last year, they did not operate fully. While individuals are observed, there is not always sufficient focus on identifying, improving and reviewing weaknesses or on giving clear feedback.
 - Professional development for staff is ongoing. All training in statutory requirements and aspects relating to health, safety and welfare has been completed. Leaders recognise the need for additional training to support improvements in teaching and current methods in the teaching of reading.
 - The school provides a rich and interesting range of activities and subjects which engage pupils of all ages and abilities. This contributes significantly to their good achievement and prepares them very well for the next steps in their lives. It promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. Additional innovative activities support and reinforce learning and personal development, such as 'Philosophy for Children', the new cross-schools programme for sixth formers. This grew out of previous work by the local authority's Global Education Centre and complements the school's International Schools Award work.
 - The provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Provision in the sixth form is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils in this age group and in Key Stages 3 and 4 experience a wide range of school and community-based activities, including 'Vocational Thursdays', sport and swimming, and business enterprise experience. Younger pupils benefit from 'Fantastic Fridays' in which subjects are linked together into exciting themes, and 'Play and Learn' opportunities with children from the local community.
 - The school benefits from the local authority's support, for example, from the educational advisers and the human resources and educational psychology departments. The local authority has recognised that the school's effectiveness has been compromised recently by the staffing issues and has provided a 'partner leader' from another school and additional support to aid its recovery.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body understands the school's strengths and weaknesses. It has played a major part in securing the new premises and has supported the headteacher effectively in addressing some staffing difficulties. However, the governing body has not paid enough attention to ensuring that the school's systems are up to date and running effectively, or that teaching and achievement are improving. Members are always keen to undertake training and, as a result, have recently adjusted their committee structure and reallocated responsibilities in line with individuals' skills. The governing body now has a clearer focus on checking that the school is working properly and on pupils' achievement. It understands what skills are expected of competent teachers and managers, and the links between teachers' effectiveness and salary progression. The governing body challenges financial decisions and value for money thoroughly. However, it does not evaluate the impact of decisions or expenditure, such as the use of the pupil premium, in relation to improvements in pupils' outcomes.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122953
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	402118

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Stanford
Headteacher	Glenys Clifton
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2010
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