



Sandgate School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112465
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289289
Inspection dates 28–29 September 2006
Reporting inspector Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Sandylands Road
School category	Community special		Kendal, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	3–19		LA9 6JG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01539 773636
Number on roll (school)	56	Fax number	01539 792101
Number on roll (6th form)	11	Chair	Mr David Oates
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr Tom Robson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2001		

Age group 3–19	Inspection dates 28–29 September 2006	Inspection number 289289
--------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties. Increasing numbers of pupils with complex difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils with autism have been admitted in recent years. The school draws pupils from a vast area, most of it rural. Socially and economically the population is broadly average. When admitted, virtually all pupils are at the very earliest stages of development and learning and all have statements of special educational need. No pupil is from a minority ethnic family. There are very few children of Nursery/Reception age who work with the Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. Boys outnumber girls by about 2:1, which is not uncommon in schools such as this.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which gives good value for money. It is much valued by virtually all parents and pupils and held in exceptionally high esteem by the community because it contributes so much. The school has improved since the last inspection. It has a good capacity to keep doing so because effective leadership and management have resulted in staff and governors having a strong grasp of its strengths and weaknesses.

The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities is often extreme. Most pupils join the school with few learning skills and at the very earliest stages of personal and social development. Several pupils have worsening conditions. Although expectations relating to national standards are not applicable to school leavers, the school has high expectations that they will make good progress in relation to personal targets agreed with parents and, wherever possible, pupils. This aim is well met because teaching is good and pupils are keen to learn and work hard. They enjoy school and parents are closely involved in planning the future for their children.

An outstanding feature of the school is its total commitment to ensuring that pupils are given the best possible opportunities to spend as much time as possible with their peers in local schools, and receive the specialist help they need through exceptionally effective partnerships with other schools and agencies. Over the past three years, 60% of pupils have had regular timetabled opportunities in mainstream schools. In June 2006 the school gained Inclusion Chartermark Status.

The organisation of the very few Nursery/Reception age children working with the Year 1 and Year 2 pupils is appropriate because the older pupils' needs are best met by continuing to access the Foundation Stage curriculum. This provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but classroom management is not always planned well enough to fully meet the huge range of ability and the wide age range of pupils or to make the best use of staff. As a result, achievement is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage.

Personal development is outstanding. Pupils are happy because they recognise they are safe and well cared for. They learn the importance of staying healthy and are helped to do so through recently introduced health care plans for those with medical conditions and the encouragement of exercise and healthy eating. Exceptional attention is paid to being part of a community, promoting independence and responsibility and preparing pupils for adult life and a positive future.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

There is a good, well managed sixth form. In recent years, all pupils have chosen to stay on at school beyond Year 11 and they are often joined by others from mainstream schools which do not have sixth form provision. Pupils have individualised programmes, carefully tailored to meet their needs. Good advice is given and daily contact with parents ensures a singularity of approach to help prepare pupils for their future lives

after leaving the school. This is further aided by all pupils attending college for one day each week following courses intended to broaden their knowledge, enhance life skills and reduce anxiety about leaving school. Teaching is good and the curriculum is well enriched by opportunities for pupils to gain first hand experience of working life and an understanding of how to cope with increasing independence and personal responsibility. Good use is made of accommodation, which is too small for the numbers of pupils. This limits opportunities for more privacy and control of their environment and also the capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

Increase achievement in the youngest class to match the good achievement in the rest of the school by:

- improving the classroom management and the organisation of the support staff
- providing a better balance in the curriculum between teacher directed and independent activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities makes comparison with national averages meaningless. When pupils join the school they are at the very earliest stages of development but, by the time they leave, some pupils have gained qualifications including entry level certification in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Many more successfully complete the nationally recognised award of ASDAN 'Towards Independence' units in the areas of food preparation, horticulture, relationships and 'out in the community'. The numbers of pupils gaining accreditation and the amount of certificates they have been awarded have risen for each of the past three years. This can be attributed to good teaching and learning and a good and improving curriculum.

Throughout the school, the main measure of progress is through the achievement of individual targets. These targets are challenging and appropriate, usually with the cooperation of parents and, wherever possible, with pupils. School records and the evidence of inspection suggest no significant difference in the achievements of any distinct group of pupils or of boys and girls other than in the Foundation Stage, where achievement is satisfactory. For a small number of pupils with deteriorating medical or cognitive conditions, progress is marked by slowing this decline; so although attainment falls, achievement remains good.

Achievement is good in English, science and personal and social development. Two years ago, the school noticed that progress in mathematics lagged behind other subjects. It still does slightly but good improvements have been made through new leadership, involvement of the local authority numeracy adviser and the purchase of new resources.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Attendance is good. Misbehaviour is very rare and nearly always associated with moments of personal crisis. Parents are unanimous in saying their children enjoy school. Several report that their children are upset when the end of term comes. The pupils confirm this and there is a strong air of happiness in the school. Pupils show an excellent awareness of how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of others and learn how not to attract unwelcome attention in public. Healthy lifestyles are strongly promoted. This results in pupils eating healthily and being as energetic as possible. From Year 7 onwards, they receive sex and relationship guidance sensitively tailored to their special circumstances. Many opportunities are created to allow pupils to raise funds for charities and the large numbers of pupils attending mainstream schools help those communities to gain an enhanced understanding of disability. The cheery nature of most pupils, the advances they make in their learning and the progress they make towards greater independence set them up particularly well for a purposeful future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good. As a result, pupils make rapid progress, behave exceptionally well and work very hard. This all contributes to good learning. Teachers show an excellent awareness of the difficulties pupils face and are skilled in compensating for these through imaginative use of varied resources and the careful deployment of good support staff. Teachers are adept at balancing learning with personal development. Perceptive attention to individuals contributes well to their involvement and enjoyment. A high awareness of the tiny steps by which pupils make progress enables staff to celebrate achievement with pupils and encourage them to learn. Learning is made enjoyable, but not at the expense of lack of challenge. Very little time is wasted. For instance, when Year 10 and Year 11 pupils were using computers to edit a letter, the text had already been typed, allowing pupils to use their time well in learning the skills of manipulating and changing the appearance of it. Sometimes though, more variation in tasks and greater consideration of how support staff can become more involved with individual pupils would benefit learners. This is particularly so in the youngest class where the age and ability range is greater than anywhere else.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It is hugely enhanced by popular activities. Planning for the Foundation Stage has contributed to the gaining of the Early Years Kitemark Award. On occasion though, there are too many directed activities and not enough independent tasks in this class. It is entirely appropriate for most Year 1 and Year 2 pupils to be included in the Foundation Stage curriculum. In Years 3 to 11 the curriculum is closely based on the National Curriculum, and very carefully adapted to reflect pupils' needs. There is good provision for English, mathematics and information and communication technology, to which the school adds personal, social and health education as a vitally important subject. The sixth form curriculum is particularly good. An appropriate range of accreditation is available and the opportunities for pupils to attend college for at least a day each week extend the curriculum well. Good attention is paid to preparing pupils for their future lives after school. All take part in work experience and learn how to use leisure time constructively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. Physical care and support are outstanding. Excellent partnerships exist between the school, parents and the many agencies involved in helping pupils. Pupils are well safeguarded through rigorous attention to the suitability of staff and their extensive training in child protection and handling techniques. The most recent independent audit of health and safety reported, 'The result of your audit was excellent'. It also confirmed that all criteria for risk assessment were satisfied. Wherever possible, pupils are involved in assessing their own progress through the opportunities to talk in tutorials about whether they have met targets in their 'Focus Files'. Educational guidance is good but the balance between assessing progress and standards occasionally leans too much towards the latter, which is of less use in helping to set new targets and offering more finely tuned support to pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. This is why the school has improved since the last inspection and maintains a good capacity to keep improving. This is a school where staff love working to the common end of improving pupils' life chances. Good self-evaluation means that the school is quick to identify strengths and weaknesses. Perceptive leadership and management then ensure that weaknesses are

quickly addressed. This has helped, for instance, to improve progress in mathematics over the past year. It has also highlighted the need to improve provision of the Foundation Stage, which has yet to happen, and the need to clarify the focus of assessment procedures. The process of self-evaluation is considerably enhanced by open mindedness of managers who listen closely to the views of parents, pupils and the large number of other professionals involved in the well-being of pupils. The school has an outstanding commitment to inclusion. This is evident in many features, including ongoing plans to register all pupils in mainstream schools as well as Sandgate, a higher proportion of pupils transferring to full-time, mainstream education than any other special school in Cumbria and the gaining of Inclusion Chartermark status at the highest level. Regular, favourable press reports of the school's achievements and involvement in the community demonstrate the esteem in which the school is held in the area and this is backed up by the views of the local authority. Over the last four years, the parent-teacher association (PTA) has raised over £250,000 to help raise standards and improve pupils' lives. In 2005, it was awarded the National PTA prize for the most effective group in the country. In the meantime, the school is bulging at the seams, oversubscribed and has used every inch of available space.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Sandgate School

Sandylands Road

Kendal

Cumbria

LA9 6JG

2 October 2006

Dear Pupils

I visited your school the other day and had a wonderful time. Thank you for making me welcome.

I see a lot of schools but not many of them are as good as yours. I have read a lot about Sandgate in the Westmorland Gazette and all of it says nice things.

You're doing well. I know that learning is hard at times but you try ever so hard and your parents are proud of the good progress you make. You are growing up into delightful, well behaved young people.

Your teachers are good and you obviously enjoy your lessons. You're very privileged to meet so many interesting people and to join in with enjoyable activities. I hope you feel safe and happy in school because everyone is working very hard to look after you.

All the adults in school keep working hard to make it better, especially your headteacher.

I'd like to see improvements in the organisation of the Catbells Helm class.

Thank you for a happy and memorable two days.

Best wishes

Alastair Younger

(Lead inspector)