

George Hastwell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112467
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	289291
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2007
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 category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	68
6th form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Kitchin
Headteacher	Mr Bernard Gummett
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2002
School address	Moor Tarn Lane Walney Island Barrow-in-Furness Cumbria LA14 3LW
Telephone number	01229 475253
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities. Many pupils also have additional autistic spectrum disorders, challenging behaviours, sensory impairment and physical/medical needs. Boys outnumber girls by more than 2:1. Nearly all pupils are White British. About a half are entitled to free school meals. The school is heavily oversubscribed and has been growing for several years. There are currently 26 more pupils than there are registered places. Sixth form students were not in school during the inspection as they were on a residential visit.

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. It has the almost unanimous support of parents and pupils enjoy attending. Good leadership and management have ensured that there has been improvement since the previous inspection. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further, helped by good teaching and learning, but hindered by underdeveloped systems for monitoring and evaluating the progress of different groups of pupils to make sure that they all making the progress they should.

Pupils achieve well. There are only three Foundation Stage children. They were at the very earliest stages of learning and personal development when they were admitted. They are making good progress. The main area of this progress is in their personal development, which is of huge importance for these children. Their academic progress is satisfactory. Progress accelerates as pupils get older. This is the result of good care, support and guidance, which helps them to overcome their personal difficulties and disabilities. The school works well with parents and many other agencies to ensure the well-being of pupils. The full scale of the progress pupils make has only partially been reflected in the qualifications pupils gain before leaving because, until this year, there was a limited range of courses leading to external accreditation. This situation has been addressed by introducing several more demanding courses leading to a higher level of accreditation.

Pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities mean that they are potentially very vulnerable. The good support and advice they are given and the care that is taken to safeguard and protect them means that they become increasingly aware of how to look after themselves, stay safe and lead healthier lifestyles. There is a strong sense of community, pupils are proud of their school and feel fully involved and influential in helping it to keep improving. By helping younger pupils to develop their basic skills and preparing older ones well for adult life the school greatly enhances their future prospects.

Staff are skilled and dedicated. They are greatly respected by parents. Nearly all are involved in an effective programme of professional development which has led, amongst other things, to significantly increasing their expertise in working with the growing numbers of pupils with autism. Good teaching is typified by good management of large staff teams and careful planning that provides plenty of practical activities for pupils. However, work is not always varied enough to meet the wide range of individual needs found in each class. Pupils receive good support, but are not all able to work with similar degrees of independence.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

There is a good sixth form. Nearly all students choose to stay on for an extra three years beyond the statutory leaving age. It was not possible to observe teaching and learning, but a brief visit to see them socialising after a hard day's caving on their residential trip gave ample evidence of their growing independence and the outstanding steps they have made in their personal development. The students were friendly, mature and full of enthusiasm. Photographs of their expedition showed their determination to overcome their difficulties and disabilities and to live life to the full. Good leadership and management ensures that the sixth form runs smoothly and efficiently, preparing students well for the future by giving them good advice about the opportunities they will have and introducing them to a suitable range of college courses and

opportunities to learn about work. The school's own monitoring, coupled with comments made by the local authority and last year's survey, provide convincing evidence that teaching and learning are good and students make good academic progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by making better use of information about pupils' progress to identify whether all groups of pupils are making the best possible progress.
- Ensure that class work is sufficiently varied to enable all pupils to work with as much independence as possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils achieve well. The extent of their learning difficulties and disabilities means that they do not attain national expectations, but they make good progress towards achieving their personal targets. Although the school does not evaluate the relative progress of different groups of pupils, inspection evidence indicates that all groups of pupils make similar progress. With younger pupils the emphasis is often on helping them to develop essential communication and learning skills to enable them to make faster progress later on. Most pupils start school at a very early level of learning and understanding. The profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities of several pupils mean that they remain at a low level of attainment throughout school. The very small steps they take in improving their performance are closely monitored and they meet most of the targets set for them in their individual plans. More able pupils frequently make enough progress for their attainment to be measured against National Curriculum levels. By the age of 19 many reach a level similar to that of mainstream pupils at the end of primary school. Ten of last year's leavers gained good credits in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Bronze Award. Five pupils also gained a total of 14 Unit Awards representing the good progress they made on college courses. This year, more able pupils are making good progress towards the wider range of more challenging courses that have been introduced this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are good. In the sixth form they are outstanding. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are almost unanimous in saying they enjoy school and nearly all stay on for an extra three years in the sixth form. Although attendance is only average in comparison with national figures, this represents a good achievement when absence enforced by complex medical and health issues and social problems are taken into account. Pupils become increasingly aware of the need to be wary of possible danger. Good personal, social, health and relationship education helps them to understand the importance of living healthily by eating and drinking sensibly and avoiding people who could take advantage of their vulnerability. Sport is popular and pupils compete successfully in competitions. Behaviour is usually good so there are few accidents or incidents that could jeopardise the well-being of pupils. There are occasional impulsive and irrational outbursts of misbehaviour, mainly related to pupils' identified difficulties or the petulance of adolescents. Great care is taken to ensure

that all pupils have a say in how the school is run. Well-adapted questionnaires enable all pupils to express their views about what they like and where they would like to see changes. Pupils are actively involved in staging events in the community to entertain others and to raise funds for a wide range of charities. The progress pupils make in improving their basic skills, coupled with their good personal development, greatly enhances their prospects in adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. This leads to pupils making good progress. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils and relationships between adults and pupils are built on trust. As a result, pupils are keen to work hard and please their teachers through their efforts and good behaviour. There are sometimes gaps in teachers' subject knowledge, especially when they are teaching older pupils about subjects in which they are not specialists. Most pupils are suitably challenged, but there are times when teachers' expectations do not match the capacity of more able pupils to learn faster and less able ones to work with more independence. Teachers are careful to check whether pupils have remembered things from previous lessons and whether they understand what is being taught. Lessons are varied, with a good variety of activities to keep pupils motivated. Most lessons include good practical activities, dialogue and the expectation that pupils record what they have learned. This helps pupils to develop essential communication and writing skills. Large classroom staff teams are well managed by teachers and skilled classroom assistants offer individuals good learning and behaviour support. Parents welcome the good communication between school and home. They appreciate the information teachers send them about their children's progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets statutory requirements and has a clear focus on promoting pupils' personal development alongside their learning of basic skills. Activities in and out of the classroom provide pupils with good opportunities to express their views and demonstrate their enthusiasm for learning and enjoyment of life. Several pupils benefit from good opportunities to spend some of their time in mainstream schools. Pupils look forward to frequent visits, which take learning out of the classroom and enrich their learning experiences. Until recently older pupils have not had the opportunity to demonstrate the full range and degree of progress they have made because the Key Stage 4 curriculum has not included enough opportunities for them to follow courses leading to external accreditation. However, this has improved this year and the school has plans to extend it further. In addition, the school has identified a few older pupils who do not fully engage in the curriculum and is currently extending work-based opportunities to address this issue.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils are well cared for, guided and supported. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that pupils are kept healthy and safe. Comprehensive arrangements to safeguard learners are rigorously followed. Pupils who are not thriving in school are quickly identified and good support is given to them to help them through troubled periods. Older pupils, especially in the sixth form are given good advice about their future options and many attend college courses which promote growing independence and prepare them for leaving school. The school contributes well to coordinating the work of the many other professionals and agencies involved in the support and care of pupils. The checking of pupils' academic progress is satisfactory. It is becoming increasingly precise and now has the potential to provide the school with the information it needs to identify where improvements can be made.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. As a result, the school is a happy, friendly place of learning, much admired by parents and loved by pupils. The headteacher and senior staff have a clear view of what they want for the future. There has been a particularly good programme of professional development for all staff in recognition of the changing profile of pupils and the recognition that more and more pupils have autistic spectrum disorders. Staff have also developed very good skills in the use of symbols to facilitate communication. Monitoring of teaching is satisfactory. It is frequent and fair, but tends to paint a broad picture rather than focussing on specific aspects that the school wishes to improve. As assessment has improved, the school has a growing amount of accurate information about the progress that individuals are making. However, staff are not sufficiently analysing and evaluating this data to spot trends and to check that all groups of pupils are making the progress expected of them. This means that whilst leaders and managers have a generally accurate picture of the schools strengths and weaknesses this is based on experience and intuition rather than fact. The school works very smoothly on a day-to-day basis and operates efficiently within its unpredictable budget. Governors offer good support but are not sufficiently involved in monitoring and evaluating standards and provision.

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Annex A

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
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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?	2	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
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?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

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?	3	3
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.

Annex A

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	3	
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	3	
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

George Hastwell School

Moor Tarn Lane

Walney Island

Barrow-in-Furness

Cumbria

LA14 3LW

1 February 2007

Dear Pupils

I enjoyed my visit the other day. I left with good memories. Thank you for letting me watch you working and playing. Special thanks to you wonderful sixth formers who told me so much about the school when I visited you on Tuesday evening at Bendrigg Lodge.

I look at schools like yours to find out what makes them good and how they can be made even better. Here is what I think.

- You work hard and make good progress because teaching is good.
- You are friendly, polite and behave well.
- You are well looked after. You are safe and happy.
- The people who run your school are doing a good job.

Most importantly to you, I have asked teachers to try to set you work which most of you can try to do on your own.

I've kept this short because your teachers are going to add symbols to this letter so that you can read it more easily. What a good idea!

All the best

Alastair Younger

(Lead inspector)