



The Grantham Ambergate School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 120746
Local Authority LINCOLNSHIRE
Inspection number 291842
Inspection dates 15–16 February 2007
Reporting inspector George Derby

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Dysart Road
School category	Community special		Grantham
Age range of pupils	4–16		Lincolnshire NG31 7LP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01476 564957
Number on roll (school)	94	Fax number	01476 573870
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Graham Cook
		Headteacher	Mr Peter Bell
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Although Ambergate is a school designated for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, its character is changing. It has a significant number of pupils with autism or other behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Nearly all the pupils are of White British origin. The needs of many pupils currently admitted can be described as complex and there is a growing intake of pupils excluded from other schools. Over recent years, pupil numbers have doubled. A new centre for pupils with autism opened in September 2006. Also at that time, the school took over refurbished accommodation at the primary school on the campus. The nature of pupils' needs means that they generally have lower attainment than what is nationally expected for their age.

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 where pupils enjoy their education. Through the school's comprehensive work-related learning programmes and effective network of support, pupils are excellently prepared for later life. Ambergate has been significantly transformed over the past few years by an enthusiastic headteacher who has worked tenaciously to improve all aspects of the school's work. As a result of his excellent leadership and extremely high expectations, the school has raised pupils' self-esteem, re-engaged many pupils with their education and improved their life chances well. Pupils' personal development is good and the pupils feel the school 'makes a difference'. They contribute well to the school and the wider community.

The pursuit of excellence has rubbed off in so many ways and the cohesive and effective senior management team ensure that high expectations are reflected in the school's work. Coordinator's roles have also improved. They have a good overview of their subjects and influence staff's work well. Because of all this, the school is well placed to improve further. There is still work to do to make it even better, such as improving further the accuracy of assessment. This is a school that knows itself well.

Partnership with parents and outside bodies, to aid pupils' opportunities in the broadest sense, is excellent. The school certainly has the confidence of the parents who hold the school in high esteem. One wrote about her child, 'he is a changed boy in many ways'. Another said: 'The difference since my child started in September 2006 is astounding. I have nothing but praise and appreciation.'

Teaching is effective and this leads to good learning. Pupils' achievement is good and some pupils make excellent progress because of the way the school switches them on to learning. However, some lessons do not always identify specifically what different groups will learn and how pupils will achieve this. The curriculum is good and has broadened significantly. It is excellently enriched and in Key Stage 4 there is a balance of a good range of academic work and an outstanding number of courses which prepare pupils for the world of work. Good health promotion is at the heart of the curriculum and pupils recognise how to stay healthy. The management of pupils is good and pupils recognise the school is a safe place, act accordingly and feel secure. They even want to make the place more 'green'.

Care is good and the school's new target setting approach is beginning to help pupils reach their personal goals. The excellent pastoral care and support they get from staff nurtures pupils and inspires them to make the very best of the chances they are given. This is a well led and well managed school which offers good value for money. It has embraced the challenge of meeting pupils' increasingly differing needs. The recently developed provision for autistic pupils is starting to impact positively and, for some pupils, the change is remarkable.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that planning clearly identifies what teachers expect the different groups of pupils to learn in lessons.

- Improve the accuracy of assessment, especially through meeting with others to agree the levels that pupils have attained.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and all groups make similar progress overall. Much has been done in recent years to improve pupils' achievement and there are examples of pupils making rapid gains since their admission.

They achieve well in each key stage. The school's data shows that pupils do best in Key Stage 3. Pupils who took the national tests at the end of Year 9 made remarkable improvements in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and science. Achievement is particularly strong in reading for pupils with autism and in writing for those with behaviour difficulties. The emphasis on written skills in all subjects is helping to improve the standard of pupils' writing overall. The school is working hard to improve pupils' literacy levels further so they are better prepared for the new examinations they are to undertake in Key Stage 4. Progress in mathematics is best in Key Stages 1 and 2 where a good number of pupils make significant progress. Pupils do less well at the higher levels in science but more rigorous planning, teaching and assessment is helping to improve progress.

Progress overall in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. Although this is good at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, pupils do less well in Key Stage 3.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils show increasing maturity as they move through the school and make an effective contribution to the school and wider community. They have a wide variety of opportunities outside of school and embrace their responsibilities at school, such as working with the school council, in a positive way. They have a strongly developed sense of right and wrong and of how their actions affect one another. As a result, relationships between all pupils are good, as is their behaviour, which has improved significantly because of the headteacher's and senior team's efforts to ensure that the school is a safe place to learn. The previously large number of exclusions has been reduced dramatically.

The positive climate in the school boosts pupils' enjoyment and their well-being. Their understanding of healthy and safe living is good because of the school's effective promotion of this. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show depth of feeling and clearly appreciate the endeavour that goes into the personal achievements of others. The oldest pupils set a fine example for younger pupils to follow. Pupils were keen to say how safe they feel, how proud they are and even 'what a good shape' the school is in. Pupils' tremendous response to their careers and work-based curriculum prepares them outstandingly for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Rigorous observation coupled with clear guidance on how to make lessons better has raised the quality of teaching. Lessons are well prepared with interesting resources. Good use is made of ICT in the primary department and this grabs pupils' attention. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and there is good humour and a great sense of fun between them. The high expectations of staff ensure that pupils do their best and achieve well. They are usually managed well and clear about how they should behave.

Pupils are supported by the good range of methods that are used. Occasionally, not enough account is taken of the way they learn in order to modify the approach, such as helping a few pupils to remember a sequence of events pictorially. In addition, not all teachers' planning makes it clear what different groups are to learn, and what processes would help them to achieve. There is usually good support in lessons by teaching assistants, although some are not always aware of their role in lessons.

Assessment is satisfactory. The school's systems for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress are rigorous in English, mathematics, science, ICT and personal, social and health education. Much has been achieved and the headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked hard to improve assessment, recording and the use of information.

They know that the next steps to further improvement are to ensure all staff have the same understanding of the criteria for different levels and, as yet, there is not a common system for assessing work in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Literacy and numeracy are promoted well and the good programme of physical education makes an important contribution to pupils' health and fitness. Personal, social and health education lessons provide positive opportunities for pupils to develop life skills. There has been a significant increase of nationally accredited awards on offer. This is having a positive effect on the range of subjects pupils can study, especially the higher attaining pupils the school is now admitting. The increase in ICT resources is leading to improved use in lessons and links between subjects. Effective links to mainstream schools and colleges ensures a wide range of successful inclusion initiatives. Opportunities in the Foundation Stage involve such links but planning is not sufficiently refined.

Educational visits and visitors help to make learning highly enjoyable and fun for the pupils. Excellent arrangements for vocational learning in Key Stage 4 enhance the good careers provision for pupils, work related learning and college links and provides them with valuable skills for entering the workforce later in life. The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme adds yet another dimension to pupils' learning. Projects such as the

Community Bike Project, where pupils repair bicycles and send them on to children's homes in Cyprus, are an example of the excellent enrichment opportunities available to pupils. However, pupils would welcome a broader range of clubs, something that the school is developing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Arrangements for child protection are well known and training needs are regularly updated for the designated person and all staff. A significant majority of staff have had first aid training, and good quality risk assessments are in place.

Parents strongly support the school and consider that their children 'make good progress both academically and personally' because it is 'a friendly, caring and supportive school'.

Pupils with a wider range of needs are now admitted to the school. They are well supported and their individual needs are met well, especially by the learning mentor. There are strong links to other schools and agencies to give an exceptional network of support and guidance. The monitoring of pupils' progress, through personal targets, assessment information and communication strategies, is well documented.

However, occasionally, pupils do not always have a clear picture of what they need to do in relation to their targets. The system is still very new and not all staff ensure that targets are written in a way which all pupils understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Although progress since the last inspection is only satisfactory, the headteacher's excellent leadership has had a significant impact on the improvement made since his arrival just over two years ago. His careful examination of priorities led to extensive improvements. The headteacher has the confidence of staff, parents and outside agencies. Working together in an extremely close-knit partnership has benefited the all-round education of pupils.

The effective senior leadership team have supported initiatives well and promoted the high quality engendered by the headteacher. Major improvements have taken place in the work of subject leaders. Having thoroughly audited important areas of the subjects, such as resources, planning and the curriculum, they are now taking a greater role influencing subject improvement. They evaluate progress and the quality of teaching well.

There is a well considered one-year school development plan which has been based on the work of subject leaders and the senior leadership team. Work is in hand to produce a longer-term plan based on local authority plans and initiatives. Governors are supportive; their knowledge of the school's work and its quality are improving but

they are not always involved in aiding the school strategically or in holding it to account for its performance.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

19 February 2007

Dear Pupils

The Grantham Ambergate School, Dysart Road, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 7LP

Thank you for talking with us and making us so welcome in your school. We enjoyed listening to your views and ideas. We were also impressed with your maturity and the way you are prepared for life after school. The school has a really good balance of work related activities and academic courses for the older pupils to take.

What a good school you have! Your headteacher has worked exceptionally hard to make it the place it is and we know you are proud to be there. You think it is a safe place to be and that behaviour has improved - we agree!

Your teachers produce interesting lessons and it is clear that you enjoy learning. You try hard and generally concentrate well. You are really well supported by staff and there are high expectations of what you can achieve. The good thing is that you rise to these challenges and do well.

We have asked the school to do two things to make it even better:

- to have a clear idea about what everyone in a lesson should achieve and how they should achieve it
- for staff to have a more accurate picture about what you have learned and the progress you make.

George Derby

Lead inspector