



Carlton Digby School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122953
Local Authority NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Inspection number 292540
Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006
Reporting inspector Patricia Potheary

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

Type of school	Special	School address	61 Digby Avenue
School category	Community special		Mapperley, Mapperley
Age range of pupils	3–19		Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG3 6DS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0115 9568289
Number on roll (school)	37	Fax number	0115 9568290
Number on roll (6th form)	17		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs J Pollard
		Headteacher	Mrs G Clifton
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002		

Age group 3–19	Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006	Inspection number 292540
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Carlton Digby is small for an all-age school and has very low numbers of pupils in any one year group, typically three or four. There are only four pupils in total aged four to seven. The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties, many with additional autism and severe behavioural difficulties. Roughly a third of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties and a few have moderate learning difficulties. Pupils' social backgrounds are mixed but include high levels of disadvantage. There is a small minority of pupils from ethnic groups other than White British, mainly of Asian or Black Afro-Caribbean origin.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Carlton Digby is a good and effective school where pupils thrive. Parents hold the school in high regard, one describing it as 'a great school, totally committed to the children's welfare.' Another described how her son is 'up and ready for the bus because he loves school so much.' Leaders constantly strive to develop the school, and staff are highly motivated to do their very best for the pupils. Pupils are clearly happy at the school, describing lessons and the work of teachers as the best part of the school day.

Although standards are low compared to schools nationally, teaching is good and pupils, including those in the Foundation Stage, make good progress, achieving well in most subjects. Pupils' good personal development and well-being and excellent behaviour are evident in the warm relationships they have with staff and each other. This leads to them having a high level of trust and a willingness to work hard and do their best. As a result of a successful school focus, pupils are exceptionally keen to stay healthy, enthusiastically taking part in exercise, especially sports, and eating plenty of fruit and vegetables.

The accommodation remains inadequate in several respects, especially in the size of some rooms and corridors for wheelchair users. This is despite the best efforts of the school and the continual improvements being made. Careful management has secured good levels of care, guidance and support for pupils' highly specialised needs. This, linked to well-adapted activities led by skilled teaching and support staff, ensures that pupils achieve well in preparation for their life after school. Well-run programmes to increase pupils' mobility, communication and independence are a successful feature. A good and very rich curriculum means that all pupils have a chance to shine and take part in activities that suit them best. For some this may mean becoming familiar with their surroundings or learning how to switch on a light display, for others it means studying for qualifications in a local school.

Excellent liaison with specialists such as physiotherapists and with other schools and organisations ensures that pupils are able to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by the school despite their difficulties. This good standard of education has been maintained over several years despite serious staff absences, largely because there has been good leadership and management. Many improvements have been made in the running of the school and in pupils' learning, but there are some weaknesses in the school improvement process. In particular teaching and learning are not evaluated rigorously enough to fully identify what could be better, and so increase the pace of improvement. In addition some initiatives, such as the new assessment system, are not being adequately monitored and followed through. Despite this, pupils of all ages, including those in the Foundation Stage, and with all types of special educational need or disability, continue to do well.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is equally good and well managed. Teaching and learning are consistently good and students make good progress and achieve well in the courses and subjects studied. They become increasingly independent and mature; good humour is a common feature of lessons. Students acquire a reasonable and increasing range of qualifications. School and college courses are helping students to prepare well for life after school. Links with colleges to broaden what is offered are still developing and the choice of courses students can make is satisfactory rather than good. Much of the provision in terms of specialised support and care mirrors that in the rest of the school and is of a high quality. Accommodation in the sixth form is inadequate. It is in two separate locations and the rooms are very small. Many of the facilities found in similar schools, such as a student flat, are lacking. This inhibits the range of activities that can be undertaken and limits students' sense of becoming young adults. Staff work tirelessly and successfully to minimise these difficulties.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor teaching and learning more rigorously in order to clearly identify points for development, and so speed up the process of school improvement.
- Develop a better system for ensuring that initiatives, such as the new assessment system, are fully implemented and lead to improvement.
- Seek to improve the accommodation especially for wheelchair users.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils achieve well and make good progress overall. Several make excellent progress, and less than satisfactory progress is rare even for those with absence through illness. Attainment on entry and standards throughout the school are low as a result of pupils' severe and complex learning difficulties. The good progress holds true for pupils in all age groups, including the Foundation Stage and sixth form. Good progress is made regardless of pupils' learning difficulties or ability, and is evident in almost every subject and course undertaken. Last year pupils with autism were not progressing quite as fast as their peers, but new arrangements and increased staff training have meant that they now do just as well. Very good, finely-tuned measures help the staff to see that pupils with the slowest rate of learning are still doing well. Pupils and students also achieve well in their qualifications from the Youth Award Scheme to Entry Level and GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' good personal development and well-being are evident in the way they get along so sociably with one another, learn to look after themselves and help others wherever they can. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and they show a sensitive appreciation of the lives and cultures of others. More limited opportunities for spiritual development mean that this aspect of their awareness is satisfactory rather than good. Pupils take responsibility whenever they have the chance, such as helping younger readers. However opportunities for all pupils to contribute in this way are limited. Nevertheless, through the school council, fundraising for charities and work in the community, pupils and students contribute well overall.

Pupils behave beautifully because they feel so positive; as one pupil said, 'Everything's best here.' Even those with challenging behaviours, as part of their condition, show improved ability to join in and take part. Pupils act very safely and there is little evidence of bullying. Their understanding of how to live, eat and play in healthy ways is outstanding. Pupils are prepared well for their futures, including developing good basic and communication skills and the ability to discuss and work in teams.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school and there are pockets of excellence. Planning for each lesson is thorough and imaginative so that pupils, whatever their level of understanding or ability, are able to make progress. Teaching assistants contribute significantly and have many specialised skills, including the use of signs and symbols to help pupils to communicate. The way learning is assessed to decide what pupils need to do to progress in the next lesson is very thorough but the assessment information is not always consistently applied so some pupils are unaware of how they could do better. Teachers' subject knowledge and use of appropriate strategies for helping pupils are very good, particularly in ICT, art and science which are taught by subject specialists. This means that, despite inconsistent use of assessment, pupils of all abilities make good progress overall.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum provides well for pupils of all abilities and interests. Groups are organised very well so that pupils can make the best of the opportunities offered to develop

both personally and academically. Pupils younger than eleven do not study a foreign language yet, although they do have registration in other languages, much to the delight of parents and pupils. Pupils' learning is made exciting and interesting in outstanding ways. There is a very strong focus on sports and healthy living, numerous trips and visitors, an after-school club and residential experiences for all pupils. This brings their learning alive and means that pupils love coming to school. Lessons in other schools, for example the successful expressive arts GCSE course, strengthen what is offered. Students in the sixth form, are able to achieve nationally recognised qualifications, but not enough of these courses are available to pupils aged 14 to 16. Students only undertake work experience on the school premises, which limits the benefits this brings.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Staff are well trained, and are highly committed to pupils' welfare and safety. Pupils feel very safe. Many have fragile conditions which require considerable expertise to manage and this is organised exceptionally well. Staff are skilled in supporting pupils' learning in lessons as well as their personal development. Lunch-time for example is a hive of activity as pupils are guided and expertly helped to become more independent when eating and moving around the school. As one parent reported, staff 'always go the extra mile.'

There is a new and comprehensive system for senior leaders to track individual pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science, so that help can be given when pupils do not do as well as expected. This does not extend to other subjects such as ICT and is not yet used consistently to help pupils become more involved in reaching their subject targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In every major aspect school leaders have maintained good quality provision since the last inspection, especially in terms of pupils' progress and personal development. This is despite a changing pupil population and serious and unavoidable long-term staff absences, especially within senior management. To have brought about key developments during this time, such as increased sixth form provision, and high quality systems for monitoring progress, has required skilled and dedicated leadership from the whole team, including governors. There have been many other improvements, including better outcomes for pupils with autism, better-developed ICT provision, sharper target-setting and improved mathematics. The quality of staff, including those who are temporary, is consistently high. Thoughtful planning compensates well for the poor quality building and lack of space. The system for monitoring pupils' progress

over time is relatively new and is very good. This is helping senior leaders considerably in deciding where improvement is most needed.

On balance, the school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. There is a thorough process for gauging how well the school is doing and for consulting parents, pupils and staff. This helps the school focus on the most important areas to develop. The resulting initiatives however are sometimes not monitored rigorously enough to ensure that they are being carried out by everyone. In addition, when lessons are observed they are not always evaluated sufficiently critically. This has led, for example, to a lack of consistency in the use of the new system for assessing pupils' progress in lessons and for setting individual targets. It is one of the reasons, alongside staff absence, why the school is maintaining rather than raising overall achievement for pupils. Because of these weaknesses the school's capacity to improve is judged to be satisfactory despite good leadership overall.

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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?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	3	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

20 October 2006

Dear Pupils and Students

The School Council, Carlton Digby School, 61 Digby Avenue, Mapperley, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire. NG3 6DS

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you very much.

We found your school to be successful, well run and caring. It is a good school, just like many of you and your parents told us it was. It helps you to make good progress. You are sensible, hard working and behave extremely well. Your teachers, teaching assistants and all care staff are very skilled at helping you to do your best and they teach you well. The way you become more grown up and learn how to do things on your own is also good and you clearly enjoy school.

We were pleased to see the large amount of sport that you play and the fruit and vegetables that you eat to try and keep healthy. You work and play very well together and we think that this, alongside your very good skills in communicating, and in literacy, numeracy and teamwork, will stand you in good stead for the future. Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of activities and links with other schools to help you learn well and improve many of your skills. The school is very successful in keeping you safe and looking after you. You told us that the school needs to be bigger and we think you are right. We have also suggested that senior staff look more carefully at how well your lessons help you and at what could be better. We also want them to check that new ideas are carried out fully. You clearly play a good part in the success of the school.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Lead Inspector