

St Giles Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122955
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Inspection number	292541
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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
Number on roll	
School	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Padgett
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Kirk
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002
School address	Babworth Road Retford Nottingham DN22 7NJ
Telephone number	01777 703683
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized special school serves a large catchment area including the Bassetlaw area, part of Newark and the Sherwood District. Numbers have increased by roughly a third since the last inspection. All pupils have statements of special educational need, reflecting a wide range of abilities and special needs, including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autism and physical difficulties. Most pupils are White British; a few are of mixed race. Pupils have a variety of socio-economic circumstances; 11 are in public care. In February, and as part of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI), the school moved into new premises located on the same site as a mainstream secondary school. From September 2007, newly built joint post-16 provision is planned between St Giles, two secondary schools and a college of further education. Currently, pupils over 16 are taught on the school site, sometimes with pupils below 16. The school's work has been recognised by a National Healthy Schools award, Sportsmark, Activemark and Investors in People awards.

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 is how it sees itself. It provides a good standard of education and good value for money because it is well led, managed and governed. Although pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills well below those expected nationally, and this remains the case throughout their school careers, this is because of the nature and extent of their learning difficulties. In fact, pupils make good progress and achieve well, because the teaching is good. Children in the Foundation Stage get a good start to their education because the provision here is good; it has improved since the last inspection. Pupils' personal development is good. Although some pupils have challenging behaviour, this is well managed by staff. Pupils develop greater self-control and more socially acceptable behaviour because they are well supported in doing so. Pupils of all ages enjoy coming to school. The quality of care and the relationships between staff and pupils are good, so pupils feel safe and secure in school, which helps them to learn. There is a wide and relevant range of learning experiences, which support academic and personal development well. A well taught programme of personal, social and health education teaches pupils about keeping healthy and safe, and there is a wealth of opportunities for pupils of all ages to take increasing responsibility and contribute to school life and to the wider community. Because pupils make good progress in developing their basic skills, independence skills, ability to work in teams and enterprise skills, they are well prepared for further education and adult life when they leave.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Although there has been considerable staff turnover, mainly because of retirements, and the school has relocated to splendid new premises, these changes have had no adverse effect on the quality of education. Most parents are delighted with the school; one noted that, 'Change has been managed admirably'. Accurate self-evaluation has enabled the school to identify what it needs to do to improve further. Staff new to the school are well supported in developing their skills, and there is a suitable range of policies to guide them in their work. However, there is no teaching and learning policy, and so there are no benchmarks against which teaching and learning are evaluated. Although teaching and learning are good, there is some inconsistent practice. Teachers do not all share with pupils the objectives identified in lessons plans, or review these with them later; they seldom remind pupils about their personal targets either. As a result, pupils are not always aware of their successes or what they need to do to improve.

Teamwork in the school is well developed, and leadership responsibilities are widely shared. 'Staff do a terrific job,' wrote one parent. Staff and the governors share the headteacher's clear vision for an inclusive school that is at the heart of its community and works in partnership with others to support all pupils with special educational needs. With its recent move, an important step has been taken in realising this vision, and pupils and staff are excited and enthusiastic about developments that are now possible that were not possible before. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers share with pupils what they want them to learn in lessons, including their personal targets, and involve them in reviewing their progress in each lesson.
- Agree with staff what constitutes good teaching and learning for all groups of pupils in the school, and use this when monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are well below average, and remain so whilst pupils are at school, this is because of the nature and extent of pupils' learning difficulties. The school's own analysis of assessment information shows that pupils of all ages, abilities and types of special educational need make good progress from their starting points because they are well taught. The teaching and range of learning experiences ensure that their individual needs are met well. The school uses its assessment information well to set challenging targets to raise achievement and most of these are successfully met. Where individual pupils do not reach predicted levels, the school can explain the reasons convincingly. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the last inspection, as resources and staff skills have been improved. In 2006, pupils in Year 11 were just as successful in obtaining Certificate of Achievement or Entry level passes in ICT as they were in English, mathematics, science, art, religious education and French. The school recognises that it will now be able to extend the range of accredited courses that it offers, in science for instance.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a good understanding of how to live healthy and safe lives. They learn well about the value of different foods and drinks, the importance of exercise and therapy, and which drugs are harmful or beneficial. Through personal, social and health education, pupils learn well about relationships, moral issues, and how to behave in different situations. A well-applied behaviour policy is helping many pupils to learn to control themselves more fully. Pupils enjoy their learning in classes and in other activities, such as the trips out, Christmas performances, and during the line dancing on Red Nose day. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory; virtually all absences are for medical reasons, and there are good systems for checking up when pupils are absent. Spiritual and cultural development is well supported through lessons, pupil-run assemblies and trips abroad, such as to France, and to Salzburg in Austria. Many pupils willingly take responsibility, support each other and help other people. They may join the school council, help organise snacks and the coffee shop, show their parents round the school, or join a variety of teams. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives by developing well their skills in English and mathematics and ICT. Older pupils develop good personal confidence, particularly through work-related courses and award-winning team enterprise projects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Staff have good relationships with pupils and the management of behaviour is uniformly good. Adults know pupils, their preferences and idiosyncrasies well and manage them accordingly. As a result, there is a calm atmosphere in lessons. Pupils clearly feel secure and answer questions with confidence; a few ask questions. Lessons are well planned and prepared. Good use is made of accurate assessment information to plan tasks and activities that are pitched at the right level to offer both a challenge and a chance of success. There are different learning outcomes expected of pupils of different abilities, but these are not always

communicated to pupils or reviewed during the course of a lesson. As a result, pupils are not as involved in their learning as they might be. Skilled teaching assistants make a strong contribution to lessons by taking small groups or supporting individuals. They give the right amount of support. Teachers use a good variety of different methods and approaches to help pupils understand and learn, including signing, symbols and stimulation of pupils' senses.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it is well adapted to the needs of pupils in each key stage. The curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is satisfactory, and is currently being further developed. Class groupings are carefully considered. Where pupils are taught in ability groups in English and mathematics, teaching is particularly effective. As the pupil population changes each year, the school constantly seeks to achieve the right balance between lessons that are planned and taught within each class base, and those that are taught in specialist rooms by subject specialist teachers. Help from visiting personnel is particularly valuable in supporting pupils' personal and social education, including their awareness of health and safety factors. Pupils aged 14 to 19 follow courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications such as the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Bronze Award, and Entry level certificates in several subjects. An after-school club provides an opportunity for a good variety of physical, art and craft activities. Pupils talk excitedly of visits and enjoyable residential school journeys, both at home and abroad. Older pupils and post-16 students have very good opportunities for activities related to work, careers and conservation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect of the school's work is well managed and is good. Several parents wrote of their confidence in staff, describing them, for instance as, 'honest yet encouraging, patient and caring'. Pupils say that they feel safe and comfortable around school, and feel able to tell staff if they have problems, or feel bullied. The effectiveness of staff training is often well seen in the way that staff successfully prevent or defuse aggressive or non-compliant behaviour by pupils.

The progress that individual pupils make in academic and personal areas is carefully assessed, and the information is used well in setting targets for each pupil. However, teachers and support staff do not remind pupils often enough about their targets in lessons. Pupils are not always as clear about their targets as they might be. Annual reviews are carried out as required and pupils attend these. Pupils are well supported by teaching assistants in class. Staff are working to develop new ways to involved pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, including extending the use of electronic aids to communication.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, partly realised now that the school has relocated to its new premises. Leadership roles are widely shared, and all who have whole school responsibilities discharge these well. For instance, phase leaders are capable and knowledgeable; they know precisely what needs to be done and work well together to secure improvements.

Teaching assistants have key responsibilities, such as health and safety, and work well as a team to enhance pupils' personal development. There is a suitable range of policies to guide staff, but no overarching teaching and learning policy. As a result, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, whilst rigorous and successful in identifying strengths and areas for development, are not focused enough on a shared understanding of what is expected.

Governance is good. Governors are committed and supportive. Through their committees and focused visits to the school, they keep the school's work under review. They ask probing questions and are fully involved in the steering group for the new post-16 provision. Because self-evaluation is good, the school's improvement plan identifies the right priorities for development. For instance, it acknowledges that staff are not equally skilled in teaching pupils with autism or profound and multiple learning difficulties and there is an action plan to address this and staff appointed to take responsibility for these two groups of pupils across the school.

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Annex A

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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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	2

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.

Annex A

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	2
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

29 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Giles Special School, Retford, DN22 7NJ

Thank you for making us welcome in your new school. We came to see how well you are all getting on and whether there are any things that could be made better.

We agree that St Giles is a good school. We were very impressed with the new building, and understand why you and the staff are excited about the future in your new school. We were pleased to find that you are making good progress with your work. This is because the teaching is good. We saw that you develop well as young people as you get older. Most of you behave well; a few who find this hard make good improvements while they are at the school. This is because the staff know how to help you with this, and also because they get on well with you. You told us that you enjoy school and we think that you are lucky to have so many visits out, even trips abroad. You also said that you feel safe in school, and we noticed that you are looked after well by the staff. There are lots of jobs that you do at school and we were pleased to hear about how you help other people, by raising money for charity or doing conservation work. It is good that you all have plenty of physical exercise and learn about healthy eating at school. You also learn to work together and find out about the world of work when you are older. The Coffee Shop is a great idea, as you are getting the chance to run a small business.

We have asked the teachers to remind you about your targets and to make sure you know what you are learning about in lessons. That way, you should know when you have been successful and have an idea of what you need to do to improve. You can help by trying to remember your most important targets. The staff are also going to agree what sort of things all teachers and teaching assistants should be doing in lessons and check to make sure these things are happening.

We hope that you will all keep up the good work, and wish you well.

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead inspector