

Newark Orchard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130996
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Inspection number	293686
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Smith HMI

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	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lesley Booth
Headteacher	Mrs Sharon Jefferies
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 1997
School address	Appleton Gate Newark Nottinghamshire NG24 1JR
Telephone number	01636 682255
Fax number	01636 682266

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Newark Orchard School is an area special school located on split sites situated within the town of Newark. Primary and Year 7 secondary, and post 16 students are based at the Town site, and secondary students in Years 8 to 11 are based at the London Road site, approximately one and a half miles away.

There are 86 students aged 3–19 with a wide range of complex needs, including students with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), moderate and severe learning difficulties (MLD and SLD), emotional social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD), additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), attention deficit disorders (ADD) and physical disabilities. Some have verbal communication problems. There are a small number of students who are from ethnic minority backgrounds and a small number of looked after children. There are two students of Foundation Stage age within the school but these are integrated within the first year class of the primary school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school is a good school with some outstanding features. It is very successful at meeting the varied and complex needs of all its students. It does particularly well in developing students' social and communication skills. Students grow in self esteem and confidence and make good progress in their education and massive strides in their personal development. Very good relationships based on trust, exist between all staff and students, which results in students' behaviour improving significantly. This enables them to benefit fully from the wide range of opportunities available to them and learn the skills they need for their future lives.

Teaching and learning is good. The development of communication skills is particularly evident and very effective within lessons, as is the calm but very effective way in which students with challenging behaviour are managed. Staff provide excellent support which results in most of the students fully participating in lessons.

The curriculum meets the needs and interests of students well and provides an appropriate range of academic activities for them to follow. Students are given good opportunities to achieve nationally recognised qualifications. Post 16 students develop particularly good work related and vocational skills with all of them progressing onto further education and training. There is an excellent range of artistic, social, leisure, cultural and physical activities in which students participate, take full advantage of and enjoy very much. Specialist resources and input provides outstanding support for students throughout their learning programmes.

Leadership and management are good. The leadership team provides the school with a clear direction leading to students developing high standards in personal development, and the promotion of outstanding care, support and guidance. Comprehensive strategic direction promotes continuous improvements. Targets are effectively identified and outlined within school improvement plans. Actions are taken and closely monitored to ensure success criteria identified within the school improvement plan are met. However, evaluations undertaken in relation to the quality of lessons needs to be more focused on the learning taking place. In addition the identification of students' achievements, in relation to their behavioural starting points, needs to be more rigorous.

The headteacher has forged excellent working relationships with other local providers and agencies which have impacted positively on curriculum development. Leaders, managers and staff have a wide range of experience and expertise which greatly benefits the school, partner organisations and the local authority.

What the school should do to improve further

- Introduce greater rigour to measuring students' progress in relation to their behavioural starting points
- Ensure students are given sufficient challenge to build on the skills already learned.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Regardless of their particular learning need or disability, or how severe it may be, most students make good progress and achieve well. A few make outstandingly good progress. Progress is generally unsteady through the school, principally because pupils may 'plateau' for a time without making measurable progress. Their communication skills develop especially well, whether

it is in speaking and listening, use of computers and other electronic equipment, or perhaps using pictures and symbols instead of spoken language. Although staff say that students make good progress towards their targets, these targets are not always clear and measurable. During discussions with inspectors, some students were unclear about their targets and what they needed to do to improve further.

All through the school, students learn social and personal skills that underpin all their other learning. A range of valuable independence skills, such as learning to look after their personal hygiene, do the shopping, prepare a simple meal or clean a room prepare the students well for their future lives.

Beginning in Key Stage 4, pupils have good opportunities to develop their learning in work-related areas. In the Post 16 unit, especially, students take advantage of work placements and college links that enhance their learning considerably. The students develop mature and positive attitudes towards moving on to other establishments.

Many students achieve well across a wide range of externally accredited subjects including GCSE standards for about half of the Year 11 students. Students also demonstrate high standards in their work, such as in art and items they produce for enterprise activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's self evaluation that personal development and well-being is outstanding. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students develop their social skills through the outstanding variety of social and leisure activities available to them. These activities are highly valued and enjoyed by all students. They participate in residential field trips including visits to foreign countries where they learn about local language, art and culture.

Many students' behaviour improves significantly as a result of the clear focus and priority given to its management. They learn to respect one another, are polite and courteous and are able to understand and appreciate the needs of other students. The number of recorded incidents, leading to fixed term exclusions, has diminished. Attendance is satisfactory overall and those students whose attendance was poor on entry have improved greatly. Pupils are valued and their enjoyment and motivation to come to school is fostered by the excellent relationships that exist between staff and pupils. The school's merit system raises learners' awareness of their rights and their responsibilities to others.

The school has achieved the Healthy School's Gold Award, which is testament to the high priority given to raising and developing students' awareness and adoption of healthy lifestyles. Students make healthy option choices during lunch and break times; they learn to cook and prepare their own healthy food; and many attend the breakfast club. Physical and cultural activities, including sports and performing arts, are timetabled for all learners and are offered after school and as part of residential holidays.

Students contribute well to the life of the school through the well-established school council which provides a valuable forum for pupils' views. Students feel safe and secure and receive strong support from staff who work closely with parents. A comprehensive range of health and safety policies and procedures are being implemented effectively including appropriate individual risk assessments.

Students develop very good work related and vocational skills, particularly for those aged sixteen and over and learn life skills useful for their future lives and independence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good because teachers adapt their lessons well to meet the varied needs of students. As seen in a football session, teachers plan activities that are increasingly challenging and extend pupils' learning progressively. Teachers use an imaginative range of equipment, often of a specialised or electronic nature, to help students' learning. It is especially good in the different areas of communication. Teaching assistants work very capably with individuals or small groups, helping with reading, signing, picture exchange books or reading from screens with giant lettering. Most students respond well in lessons: they are interested, happy and very willing to join in with discussions and team activities. Students with the most profound learning difficulties are well taught, with very good numbers of staff to help. These students enjoy many activities that stimulate their senses and increase their awareness of the world around them. All staff are very good at giving praise, encouraging pupils and managing behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants adopt a calm but firm approach and succeed in getting students to refocus on their work.

On a few occasions some students were engaged in routine tasks and as a consequence they were not sufficiently challenged. On these occasions, students' become restless and their learning slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it is solidly based on promoting the progress of students with widely differing needs. It develops well from each year group to the next, with a strong thread of personal and social development throughout. Students learn to carry out many 'everyday living' tasks that give them a good degree of independence. There is a good emphasis on learning mathematics and developing communication skills, including using electronic aids. These are reinforced well in lessons in many other subjects. At Key Stage 3, students have a satisfactory choice of subjects, such as music, and take a wide range of courses that are accredited by national agencies. Opportunities for learning work related skills are good, and are well supported by outside agencies, particularly a local college where many older students have weekly lessons. The Post 16 unit offers a good, relevant and distinctive extension to the curriculum of the lower part of the school. Courses are challenging for different levels of ability and interests, including, for instance, horticulture and independent living skills. Many courses are either accredited by national organisations, or linked with the local college.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Staff are highly committed to promoting the health and welfare of students and all requirements are met fully. Students' communication skills are enhanced significantly by the work of specialist communication teachers. Assessments and reports by external support agencies and professionals provide valuable information to effectively deploy support staff and services according to students'

need. The school counsellor fulfils an excellent pastoral support role to enable students to cope with the emotional difficulties they may experience. 'Connexions' services and careers guidance is very good, enabling students to make well informed choices about their future education and training. Students who present behavioural challenges receive extra support from personal education assistants to help them to re-engage in learning. Individual behaviour plans also provide very useful information about the strategies and preventative measures that enable students to learn well. Parents feel that the school provides excellent support to pupils within a safe and secure environment. The school's policy and practice in relation to child protection meet current requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and sets a clear strategic direction for the school based on meeting the very wide range of pupils' complex needs. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are in the process of redevelopment. Managers are committed to the established of continuous improvement, and demonstrate a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher is very successful in raising the profile of the school within the local authority and is highly valued for the lead taken in the dissemination of skills and good practice. She has developed excellent working relationships with local schools to promote joint activities and curriculum development.

All staff work very effectively as teams and are involved in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. These are translated into closely monitored targets within the school improvement plan. The headteacher, assistant heads and teaching assistant manager, are effective in monitoring provision, especially in relation to the students' care, support and personal development. This focus has a positive impact on students' good progress and the successful re-engagement of disaffected students back into education. The quality assurance of lessons successfully identifies the many strengths of individual staff and helps to determine future training needs. However, insufficient attention is given in lesson evaluations to the extent to which students are learning and progressing. Whilst the recording and evaluation of progress has improved in relation to students' personal and academic progress, further work needs to be done to show how well students make behavioural progress over time.

The promotion of equal opportunities throughout the curriculum is good. The evaluation of the impact on students' progress of 'Every Child Matters' is an excellent initiative. Although the school buildings are old and in need of renovation, best use is made of these to provide a bright and stimulating environment. Specialist resources are very good and the skills and expertise of staff are well developed through a wide range of training and staff development activities on offer.

Governors are highly committed to the school and its students. They provide very good support and challenge to the senior managers. Good processes exist for governors to evaluate the quality of provision. Finances are well monitored and the school provides good value for money.

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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?	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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?	1

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

25 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Newark Orchard School, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1JR

As you know we recently visited your school to find out how well you are doing. Thank you for making us feel welcome. We enjoyed our visit and learned a lot about the school. Thank you for talking to us.

Newark Orchard School is a good school. Some things that it does are outstanding. Here are some of things that we saw:

- The good progress you make, especially in personal development and in your behaviour.
- The lessons are good and the things you take part in, such as trips out, residential, sports, and plays you perform in, all help you to learn the social skills you will need in your future lives.
- The care, support and guidance you receive is outstanding
- The way in which the school is led and managed is good

The school should improve a few of the activities within lessons so that you carry on learning new things, and in being able to say more accurately what progress you have made since being at the school

Best wishes

Kath Smith HMI