

The Cedars School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108422
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	301668
Inspection dates	20–21 June 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	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Peter Moran
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Fraser
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2004
School address	Ivy Lane Low Fell Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE9 6QD
Telephone number	0191 4334046
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Cedars is a school for pupils with physical difficulties, speech and language disorders, and a wide range of other needs often associated with emotional vulnerability. In recent years, the school has enrolled significant groups of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties. These have added to its traditional role as a school for physically or medically challenged pupils. The family backgrounds of pupils are broadly representative of the community and a higher than average proportion are entitled to free school meals. Attainment on entry varies widely. It is usually below average and frequently well below average. Boys outnumber girls by about two to one. Nearly all pupils are White-British, with English as their main language. Very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Most pupils in the Foundation Stage transfer to other schools for their primary education. Many other pupils are admitted at the start of Key Stage 3.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Cedars evaluates itself as a good school and better than at the time of the previous inspection with a good capacity to keep improving. The inspection confirms this view. Pupils love coming to school and nearly all their parents are very happy with all aspects of its work. Good leadership and management ensure that staff work extremely closely and effectively with parents and a huge range of therapists and other professionals to provide outstanding care, guidance and support to pupils. This contributes enormously to enabling individuals to make good progress.

Pupils get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. They have a huge range of difficulties with some at the very earliest stages of social and educational development. Good teaching in the well-managed department ensures that all these pupils achieve well and make good progress in their personal development. This allows many to move to other schools before the start of Key Stage 1.

The nature of pupils' difficulties and/or disabilities means that most do not attain national standards by the end of each Key Stage but good teaching helps pupils of all ages to achieve well. Individual progress is carefully and accurately checked, as is the quality of teaching, but the progress made by different groups of pupils is not routinely monitored. This is of growing importance because of the increasing complexity of the school population. The inspection evidence points to nearly all pupils making good progress. Many of the pupils who join the school in Key Stages 3 or 4 are higher attaining than other learners but have more pronounced emotional difficulties. In the safe and secure environment of The Cedars, where behaviour is good, most of these pupils thrive and achieve good results in examinations, including GCSE, at the end of Year 11.

The curriculum is outstanding. It allows pupils to make good progress and achieve qualifications in a wide range of subjects. Big improvements have been made since the last inspection by offering more vocational opportunities to prepare pupils for entering employment when they leave. The school has been designated as a Sports College from September 2007 in recognition of its long-standing success in the field of physical education. This is an important factor in its success in helping pupils to live increasingly healthy lives. A huge range of exciting activities add enrichment and enjoyment to learning. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to the community of the school. Their views are regularly sought and acted upon. The progress pupils make in their learning and personal development ensures that most of them face much more positive futures on leaving school than either they or their parents expected when they were admitted. Limitations of the site and factors beyond the school's control have combined to slow down much-needed development of the accommodation. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Evaluate the progress of different groups of pupils to ensure that each is equally well provided for and making the expected progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The nature of pupils' difficulties means that they rarely attain national standards but, taking into account all factors, they achieve well. From what is frequently very low attainment on

entry, pupils make good progress through the Foundation Stage. Those who stay at The Cedars often leave Key Stage 1 within the first level of the National Curriculum. By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils have reached Level 1 or 2 in English, mathematics and science. This represents good progress. The intake of a significant number of new students at the start of Key Stage 3 widens the range of attainment but students continue to progress well, making gains of between one and two levels of the National Curriculum. This is the same progress expected of students in mainstream schools, but from a lower starting point. By the time they leave at the end of Year 11, many students have made sufficiently good progress to gain nationally recognised qualifications. Last year, three students gained five or more passes in GCSE examinations and all six leavers gained a minimum of seven Entry Level passes. Students also meet with success in gaining ASDAN bronze, bronze/silver and silver awards. Good opportunities have been created this year for students to make better progress in work-related learning. This has been a weakness in the past. It is too early to judge the success of these initiatives. The school does not routinely monitor the progress of different groups of pupils but inspection evidence points to all groups making similar progress because teaching is uniformly good and the assessment of individual progress is precise.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Good spiritual, social and moral development is clearly evident in the way pupils behave well and act sensibly around school. This ensures that it stays a safe and happy place where pupils share a strong sense of celebration and mutual support. Cultural development is good, with pupils regularly learning about their own culture and that of others from different parts of the world. There are incidents of misbehaviour, a few of them serious, but usually related to pupils' assessed difficulties and always well managed by skilled staff. Pupils attend whenever they can and virtually all of them, and their parents, say they enjoy school. The trend in recent years to admit more pupils who have become anxious or phobic about attending previous schools, combined with a high degree of medical need, keeps attendance figures lower than the national average but good in the context of the school. Physical education is a subject the school prides itself on. Pupils are encouraged to participate wholeheartedly in exercise and adventure and most do. This contributes to promoting healthy lifestyles. On the downside, many pupils have stopped taking school meals since the introduction of healthier options. There is a strong sense of community in the school, with pupils being encouraged to have their say about changes they would like. Pupils also contribute enormously to the local community through fundraising and entertaining people from nearby. Further from home they contribute to the disabled community by their wholehearted participation in many national sporting events including the National Junior Swimming Championships and Stoke Mandeville Mini Games. The progress made by pupils in their learning and personal development stands them in good stead for bright futures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching helps pupils to learn well and make good progress. Classrooms are well organised and teamwork amongst staff is good. When teachers plan lessons, they pay close attention to individual pupils' needs, but occasionally focus more on what is to be taught than what they expect pupils to learn. Teachers arrange extra support for those who need it and set harder

work for the more able. Occasionally, this work could be even harder. A few pupils say that the work in a minority of lessons is too easy. A good feature of all lessons is the way staff encourage pupils to work together in pairs or small groups to complete tasks. This strongly supports their personal development. Classroom staff are very patient, which greatly helps pupils with communication difficulties to express themselves and play a full part in lessons. This occasionally slows the pace of learning for others but this is outweighed by the benefits of increasing pupils' consideration for others. Pupils are carefully observed by all staff to ensure that all signs of progress are noticed and recorded. This is especially so in the Foundation Stage where these observations provide valuable assessment information. Rare incidents of misbehaviour are well managed by staff with the result that other pupils' learning is rarely disrupted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The Foundation Stage curriculum covers all areas of learning and balances classroom learning well with social and personal development. The curriculum for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils closely resembles that of a mainstream school with a strong focus on promoting literacy and numeracy. The Key Stage 3 and 4 curriculum has an excellent focus on preparing students for gaining qualifications with opportunities for students to do so in every subject. Last year the school identified that the curriculum was not fully meeting the needs of a few students with more complex difficulties and lower attainment. It promptly introduced a greater range of work-based courses in local colleges and with other training providers. This year nine Key Stage 4 students have followed courses which, when combined with good work-experience opportunities, lead to accreditation. Thirteen students have applied for vocational college courses next year. Enrichment is outstanding. There are a huge number of clubs and activities out of class. These are finely balanced to ensure that they contribute to learning as much as personal development. An outstanding recent success was the participation of ten Year 11 students in a week-long residential trip aboard a Dutch sailing boat.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils receive an outstanding quality of care, guidance and support. As a result, the school has considerable success in helping pupils to overcome their emotional and/or physical fragilities and make good progress. Arrangements for the physical care and safeguarding of pupils meet all requirements. The school coordinates the work of a huge range of other professionals to ensure that all needs are assessed and monitored. Parents are fully involved in all reviews and decisions about their children's futures. Pupils' progress is regularly and accurately checked so it is quickly noticed if any pupil is encountering problems. When this is the case, prompt action is taken to remedy the situation. Older students are given comprehensive advice about the opportunities open to them on leaving school and improvements to the curriculum over the past year have put them in an increasingly good position to pursue these.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management are complemented by good, supportive governance. They have created an environment in which pupils enjoy learning, staff enjoy teaching and parents enjoy the reassurance that their children are safe and doing well. The well-established leadership

team has a good understanding of the school. It gets this from long experience, excellent assessment of individual pupils' progress and good monitoring of teaching and learning. What is missing at the moment is fine-tuning by monitoring and evaluating the progress of different groups of pupils more closely. This is becoming increasingly important given the changing profile of admissions. It would allow the school to confirm that all groups of pupils are achieving to the best of their ability and to be confident that funding and training are being directed to where they are most needed. Good school improvement is ongoing. The strength of provision for physical education is being built upon through the successful bid to achieve the status of Sports College which will open up opportunities to extend links with other schools. Previous weaknesses, such as the vocational curriculum for Key Stage 4 students, have been addressed over the past year.

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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 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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?	1
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Cedars School, Tyne and Wear, NE9 6QD

Thank you for welcoming me to your school a while ago. I know a few of you were curious to know why I was visiting. I told you I was looking at everything and everybody and that I would write you a letter about what I saw. This is it.

I think The Cedars is a good school. You work hard and are taught well so you make good progress. Well done all of you older pupils who took exams this year, I'm confident you will do well. Your timetables are packed with fabulous opportunities to learn and I know you really enjoy all the trips and clubs because you kept telling me.

It is clear that a lot of you feel much safer and happier than you did in some of your previous schools and I can see why. You are being extremely well cared for and getting some excellent advice to help you in the future.

I left with the suggestion that staff could use all the information about the progress you, as individuals, were making to check that different groups such as boys and girls or those of you facing similar difficulties are all getting on as well as each other. I think you are but it's worth checking.

Good luck for the future

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector