

RNIB Sunshine House, Northwood

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102463
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	308015
Inspection dates	11–12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	30
Appropriate authority	The proprietor Dr Catherine Dicks
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Clery (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2001
School address	33 Dene Road Northwood HA6 2DD
Telephone number	01923 822538
Fax number	01923 826227

Age group	2–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Sunshine House is a non-maintained day and residential special school for pupils aged 2-11 years who have multiple complex disabilities and are blind or partially sighted. There are currently 30 pupils on roll and each has a statement of special educational need. It is owned by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), which provides three governors. Pupils are placed in the school by a wide range of local authorities. Their backgrounds are socially, economically and culturally very diverse. Few pupils have any form of oral communication. Since the last inspection there have been several interim acting headteacher appointments. The current acting headteacher was appointed on 5 December 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Sunshine House provides a safe and caring environment in which pupils can develop their personal skills. However, over the last two years, there has been a lack of stability in the leadership and management of the school. The pace of improvement following the previous inspection has not been good enough to enhance pupils' progress. As a result, their achievements are inadequate. Due to their very complex needs, pupils start school with very low levels of attainment. Too many leave having made few changes for the better. Teachers do not receive the guidance and support they need to set challenging targets and ensure that pupils' needs are fully met. The school's target setting processes are inadequate. The systems to record, monitor and evaluate pupils' progress do not identify clearly enough the 'small steps' in learning that pupils make or provide a clear direction about what they need to do next. Consequently, teaching and learning are also inadequate. Staff are very caring and through the one-to-one system of support used across the school they enable pupils to develop their personal skills appropriately.

Since the last inspection, the school has been led and managed by a variety of interim acting headteachers and deputy headteachers. A substantive deputy headteacher was confirmed in post in September 2007 but, as yet, no substantive headteacher appointment has been made. These changes in senior personnel and in their roles and responsibilities have limited strategic planning severely and held back the active involvement of governors in decision making. Areas for improvement have been identified, but the lack of stability in senior management personnel means that not everyone is aware of them and they are not pursued rigorously. The school's systems to monitor and check the impact of developments on pupils' achievements and its overall effectiveness are inadequate.

In addition, changes in leadership have affected adversely the accuracy of judgements about the school's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the confidence of staff in the school's ability to move forward. Governance has been revised recently in line with national RNIB requirements. However, not all governors are sufficiently clear about their role and responsibilities to enable them to act effectively as a critical friend to the school. The lack of a clear view for the school's future development and limited progress since the last inspection show that the school's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 4

The pupils' progress is inadequate because of the legacy of weaknesses in the provision. Teaching is not yet good enough to bring about significant improvement because the issues that affect performance in the main school apply equally to the Foundation Stage.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The Social Care Inspection carried out in July 2007 judged the residential provision to be very good. Progress against the action points in that report is proceeding at an appropriate pace. At present, the Residential Unit caters for two pupils on a full-time basis between Monday and Thursday each week with respite care for individuals on a part-time basis. The Residential Unit has developed its own system for recording pupils' achievements, but weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in the main school mean that best use is not made of the residential provision to supplement and enhance the learning of pupils who are placed there.

What the school should do to improve further

- Restore stability to the senior management structure to set a clear context within which the school can move forward with confidence.
- Ensure that all governors are clear about their role and responsibilities so that they can act as an effective critical friend to the school.
- Implement rigorous and robust systems so that the effectiveness of the school's provision can be judged accurately and bring about improvements to the quality of teaching.
- Set challenging targets for each pupil and monitor their progress regularly to ensure that all make the progress of which they are capable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils enter the school with very low standards. A significant proportion leave having made little improvement. Although most make some progress in developing their communication skills, it is not sufficient to support their learning in other areas. As a result, their overall achievements and progress are inadequate. The school's target setting processes and the recording of pupils' achievements lack rigour. This means staff cannot demonstrate that the progress pupils make or identify the next steps in learning. At the end of their time in school, the skills of most pupils remain too low.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Staff build up good relationships with pupils and these provide a firm foundation for the development of pupils' personal skills. Staff make pupils aware of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. They do this through physiotherapy, physical exercise sessions and the provision of healthy meals provided by the canteen. Throughout the school, staff work carefully with pupils to develop their independence and enable them to make choices. However, there are occasions when this support role does not give pupils sufficient opportunity to exercise choice independently. Many pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good, given the wide range of medical needs. Behaviour is good and the school provides a safe and secure environment. Pupils are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the school community; for example by taking registers to the office. Only recently have specific numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) sessions been introduced and, consequently, pupils' skills in these areas are not well developed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

All staff are committed to the pupils in their care and want to do their best to help them. However, the systems through which staff are expected to set targets and record and monitor pupils' progress are not consistent. Consequently, reviews of pupils' progress and the evaluations of it, do not have the rigour needed to ensure that all achieve of their best. At the weekly review meetings, staff plan the work for the coming week before they have checked the progress pupils have made previously. Consequently, planning is not sharply focused on the needs of the pupils and the next steps in their learning. This makes it difficult to set success criteria against which the impact of activities on pupils' progress can be judged. Staff do not have confidence that the support and guidance they need to develop their own practice and expertise will be provided.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The revised curriculum, which was introduced in September 2007, better reflects the age and interests of pupils. The morning sessions now focus on work related to pupils' individual targets with more open-ended activities in the afternoon. However, the different record keeping formats used in these sessions, complicate the evaluation of information about pupils' progress. This adversely affects the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the changes on pupils' learning. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in activities out-of-school such as a trip to the pantomime, horse riding and the annual visit to the outdoor centre. These are highly valued by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The nature of pupils' needs is such that all require one-to-one support and help to develop their learning. In all areas of the school, staff treat pupils with dignity and respect. Annual reviews, linked to each statement of special educational need meet statutory requirements. The individual education plans that arise from these reviews are not detailed enough to be helpful in checking pupils' progress. All pupils have a home/school book to enhance communications, but the use that staff make of it is variable. Overall, these aspects of the care and support given to pupils are satisfactory. However, the guidance and support which they receive to develop more specific skills in different areas of learning are inadequate and staff are not clear enough about what pupils need to learn next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The changes in leadership and management personnel over the last two years and the lack of clarity about the role of the governing body as a critical friend have limited the strategic vision of the school. The governing body is not sufficiently involved in decision-making. There have been short-term initiatives stemming from the enthusiasm of individuals to make things better for the pupils. A number of consultants from the RNIB has been employed, but their influence

has often been short lived, because there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for implementing and monitoring their recommendations. This has significantly hampered developments to improve provision and has adversely affected staff confidence in the leadership and management of the school. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of provision are not secure. Consequently, the leaders' views of the school's strengths and weaknesses are over optimistic.

There is a lack of confidence at all levels in the school's capacity to improve.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	4
The effectiveness of boarding provision	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of RNIB Sunshine House, Northwood, Northwood, HA6 2DD

Thank you for all the help you gave me and the very interesting talks we held during my inspection of your school on 11 and 12 December 2007.

Many of you showed me how much you enjoy the opportunities to make visits outside the school. All of you who went to the pantomime really enjoyed the trip and one of you was very anxious to tell me about how much she enjoyed the horse riding sessions each Monday. You like the way staff help and support you in developing your personal skills. I agree that these are important features of your life at Sunshine House.

Those of you who have been at Sunshine House for the last few years will remember that you have had a number of different headteachers and deputy headteachers. This has been unsettling for your teachers and I want this to change through the appointment of a new headteacher who will work with you in the future. I want this person to set up strong new systems so that Sunshine House becomes a good school. When I watched you in lessons, I was not sure that all of you were able to show that you were achieving your best. This is because the systems the school uses to show how well you are achieving do not work as well as they should. I want the group of people known as the school's governing body to take a much greater look at your progress so that all of you can do as well as you can. Your school needs extra help so that it can improve quickly, we call this 'special measures'. Inspectors will come regularly to check that the improvements needed are being made.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Sunshine House and that you all do your best.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Charlton

Lead Inspector