

Southlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108653
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309757
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Mel Blackband

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cyril Freeman
Headteacher	Mr David Erskine
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2005
School address	Beach Road Tynemouth North Shields Tyne and Wear NE30 2QR
Telephone number	0191 2006348
Fax number	0191 2005674

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for students with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and for a minority of students with additional social, emotional and behavioural needs. Almost all the students are of White British heritage and all speak English as their main language. There are twice as many boys as girls. Nine students are currently in the care of the local authority.

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 where students make excellent progress in their personal development. There are also outstanding strengths in the school's curricular provision. All students achieve well in their studies and a few make excellent progress. Students were agreed that 'This is a brilliant school!' and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing that the school has high expectations of their success. One parent's comment was typical: 'Our daughter has soared at Southlands.'

Students feel secure and well supported. They learn how to remain healthy, to keep themselves safe and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and their good attendance. Staff provide excellent support for students with additional social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These students make outstanding progress in developing positive attitudes to learning and in their confidence to tackle new work. This underpins their good achievement.

The standard of teaching is closely monitored and this helps to ensure that lessons are interesting and well managed. Teaching throughout the school is good. Students enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. However, students' small steps in progress are not always assessed or recorded accurately. As a result, educational support and guidance are not fully effective because targets to help students improve their work are not always clear and helpful.

Students' learning is enriched by the many excellent opportunities which they have to interact with the community, by good programmes in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and in the outstanding work-related learning for older students. The school has developed excellent relationships with other schools and local training providers. These enable higher ability students to study for a range of GCSE qualifications in mainstream schools and give all the students in Years 10 and 11 the opportunity to experience a wide range of vocational and leisure opportunities, often in the company of mainstream students. Students are prepared well for moving on to the next stage in their lives, whether through further education or training. The curriculum for information and communications technology within the school has greatly improved and the provision is now good.

The head teacher's considerable experience, expertise and continuing enthusiasm have resulted in outstanding leadership. In particular, he has strengthened and reorganised the senior team. As a result, senior staff are increasingly influential in moving the school forward. The governors of the school have significantly improved the quality of their strategic management since the previous inspection. The school evaluates its own work accurately. It is well placed to build on the good progress made since the last inspection and there is a good capacity to improve provision further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency and accuracy of the assessment and recording of small steps in students' learning.
- Improve the sharpness and focus of learning targets so that they always show students clearly how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although many students enter the school with low levels of attainment, most achieve well and some make outstanding progress. By Year 11 all students gain accreditation at a variety of levels in a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications. A few higher ability students approach expected mainstream levels of attainment in terms of GCSE success. Many students make outstanding progress in reading and in speaking and listening skills because the school prioritises the development of students' communication skills. Students with additional needs such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties achieve well because of the excellent support they are given to overcome the barriers to their learning. Most students make outstanding progress in meeting behavioural targets. Some have also successfully completed the Bronze and Silver stages of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

Teachers track students' progress in the acquisition of basic skills effectively and this has had a positive impact on their continuing achievement. However, senior staff are aware of the need to simplify tracking procedures to ensure their accuracy and consistency.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' excellent progress in all aspects of personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, reflects the school's strong emphasis on moral and social values. This is demonstrated in the outstanding behaviour of the students. Students are very considerate to other pupils and staff; they develop a clear understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and of keeping themselves safe. Students contribute significantly to the well-being of everyone at the school through, for example, their considerable input into the school's 'Code of Conduct'. Their good progress in basic skills and the high quality of work related learning means that they are very well prepared for when they leave school.

Students know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. They make outstanding gains in their social skills because teachers provide excellent role models for them. The students with additional behavioural needs make outstanding progress in their willingness to participate in lessons with other students. When, on occasions, pupils' behaviour becomes unacceptable it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the pupil involved.

Students are adamant that there is no bullying or intimidation at school. One student commented that, 'We are like one big happy family here.' Parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. One parent wrote, 'Children have confidence and are very happy.' This is reflected in the students' good and improving attendance and very positive attitudes to school, which have a substantial impact on their achievements. The high number of parents who returned questionnaires consistently praised the school for its positive impact on their children's lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The standard of teaching throughout the school has risen consistently since the previous inspection because of the clear and effective monitoring of teachers' performance by senior

staff. Teachers and their assistants have a good understanding of their students' overall abilities. Students thus receive a high level of support when necessary. As a result, they become much more confident in attempting new things and this has a positive impact on their achievement. Planning for lessons is generally good, because teachers work from clear schemes of work, although teachers do not always accurately record each small step in the students' progress and consequently, their learning targets are sometimes less well focused. This slows down the pace of learning. Students like their teachers and the support staff, and so respond well in lessons. Teachers motivate students effectively through interesting and well paced activities. The management of behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Students understand and respond well to the clear routines, and this assists in keeping a strong focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The breadth and balance of learning programmes have been significantly improved since the previous inspection. Students' learning is consistently enhanced by an outstanding range of extra activities. There are frequent trips and events which support students' understanding of their own and other cultures and teach them that new things can be learned in a variety of situations. This adds considerably to their enjoyment of school. Students with additional difficulties are fully included in activities.

Programmes in personal, social and health education have a significant impact on students' achievements in their personal skills. There are well-managed and effective programmes in literacy and numeracy. The arrangements for vocational and work related learning are outstanding. Students are given excellent opportunities to make their own choices from a wide range of courses which all lead to nationally approved qualifications. Exemplary practice ensures that students from the school are able to integrate fully with those from mainstream schools. The excellent links are continued where higher ability students attend mainstream lessons to gain GCSE qualifications and thus reach their potential. Less confident students from mainstream schools are similarly given opportunities to come to Southlands School to improve their basic skills. Excellent post-16 participation rates in further education or training typify the success of the school's well organised work experience programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Rigorous safeguarding procedures, such as child protection and checks on staff help to ensure the school is a safe and happy place. Students make excellent progress in their social skills and moral development because of very strong behaviour management and the excellent support from all staff members. This is an outstanding strength of the school. Students are made aware when they have produced good work and the practice of including them in the assessment of their own learning is becoming established. Students who are looked after by persons other than their own parents are well supported. Students, including those with additional difficulties, clearly understand their behaviour targets and make outstanding progress in personal skills as a result. The students' learning targets, however, are not made clear to them often enough, and they are not precise enough to enable them to understand how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior staff have successfully led a staff team which helps all students to achieve equally well, and which is committed to seeking improvement. Students' progress is monitored and senior staff have an overview of achievements, though inconsistencies remain in the accuracy of recording some of the small steps in learning. The school's planning is appropriately focused on issues for improving students' performance.

Communication within the school is good and the high quality of professional training is effectively linked to procedures for managing the performance of teachers and other staff. This has made a significant contribution to improving the consistency of teaching and, in turn, students' good achievement. Resources are well used and the school gives good value for money. The membership of the governing body has been substantially strengthened since the previous inspection and governors now monitor each aspect of the school's performance effectively.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

9 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Southlands School, North Tyneside, NE30 2QR

When I came to your school recently, you made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classrooms and at lunchtime. Thank you for your friendliness and excellent manners and the way you helped me with my work.

I was only with you for two days. That was long enough for me to realise that you go to a good school. I could see that you all enjoy school. There were lots of things that I liked.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in your personal development.
- You have an excellent range of activities, which make lessons more interesting and teach you about the local and other communities.
- The older students amongst you have lots of opportunities to learn skills which will be useful when you leave school. You also have the chance to mix with students from other schools. This will help you to be more confident when you go into new situations.
- All the adults at the school look after you very well.
- Lessons are interesting and you are well taught. This means you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Your school is well led and managed.

I think the school could improve even further if each bit of progress that you make was carefully written down. This would help to give you the right targets to aim for as you try to improve your work.

You can help, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing and by continuing to support each other so well!

Please thank your parents for the helpful and supportive comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes to you all

Mel Blackband

Lead Inspector