

Springwell Dene School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108881
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	309826
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Noreen Buckingham

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	12–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Short
Headteacher	Mr Graeme Shillinglaw
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2003
School address	Swindon Road Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR3 4EE
Telephone number	0191 5536067
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Springwell Dene School admits students who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some have additional problems which affect their learning. Attainment on entry is below what would normally be expected for their age, often because of prior poor attendance and/or disrupted education at their previous schools. Only 3 of the students on roll are girls. All students are from White British backgrounds and 12 are in the care of the local authority. All students have a statement of special educational need. Just over half of students are eligible for a free school meal. The school also has two off-site bases for more vulnerable students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The outstanding quality of education which Springwell Dene offers its students has been maintained since the last inspection. This does not mean that the school has stood still. It has made many improvements. These include increasing opportunities for accreditation, involving pupils more in assessing their own work, introducing peer mentoring for teachers and carrying out a whole school curriculum review. These improvements are due to the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the senior management team. There is a shared vision among all staff and teamwork across the school is a major strength. Parents are fully supportive of the school and many made very complimentary comments: 'This is the best school my son has been to'; 'I would give it 11 out of 10'; 'It's a happy school with many moments of humour.'

Students' achievement is outstanding. Due to their previous disrupted history in education, students enter school with low levels of attainment. However, students' good attendance and extremely positive attitudes in lessons along with good teaching are rewarded by examination results that show students' achievement is outstanding. All students leave with some form of external accreditation, either GCSE, Entry Level, AQA ELC Literacy and Numeracy and a wide range of AQA Units. Many students gain grades A to C as well as lower grades of D to G. Students are also extremely successful in art and design and music. Displays of students' artwork are stunning!

Assessment procedures are well established and data are analysed very critically. The school also uses standardised assessments to predict examination success and subsequently monitors students' progress really well to ensure they reach their potential. Whole school planning and plans for teaching are fully informed by the assessment data and are reviewed regularly. The data identified a weakness in English at Key Stage 3 and the school is implementing systems to improve this.

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Teachers have secure understanding of the subjects they teach and are skilled in managing students' behaviour. On a few occasions, the vitality seen in the best lessons is not always evident, which results in a few pupils' attention drifting and the pace of learning drops. The team of teaching assistants and other adults make a strong contribution to lessons and students' learning. Their skills are very well used to extend and enrich the curriculum, giving students opportunities to experience a very wide range of activities. The curriculum is extremely well organised and the range of clubs and extra-curricular activities is extensive, especially the breadth of physical activities. Strong emphasis is given to personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHE) which has a positive effect on students' personal development.

The school council and circle time give students many opportunities to express their opinions, enabling them to have some influence on what happens in school. As a result of the excellent care and support, students' personal development is outstanding. Personal tutors, allocated to every student, know them very well and nothing is too much trouble to ensure that any issues are resolved.

By the time they leave school, students are confident and mature and extremely well prepared for moving on to the next phase of their lives. They talk to visitors politely and say, 'This is the best school I've been to. The teachers listen and help you.' The leadership and management of the school have been crucial in maintaining the impressive quality of education the school

offers. Governors are very supportive and their expertise is used effectively in a number of areas across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching so that all lessons have the same pace and vitality as seen in the best examples.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The majority of students arrive at school with a lower than average level of attainment because their education has been disrupted due to the nature of their difficulties. However, students' achievements overall are outstanding and this can be seen in their success in a wide range of accreditation opportunities. Since the previous inspection, the range of externally accredited examinations has increased year on year. However, the school does not stand still and continues to ensure that all students' individual needs are successfully met and have their work externally assessed and accredited. There are 37 externally assessed examinations on offer ranging from GCSE to Entry Level and AQA ELC Literacy and Numeracy. Of three students who gained 8 GCSE passes, one student gained 5 A to C grades, including English and mathematics. Art and design is a particular strength and last summer all students who entered achieved grades from A to C. Students from Year 9 onwards succeed in a number of AQA units. The development of a recording studio has added considerably to students' interest and achievement in music.

Assessment procedures are well established and give staff an indication of students' progress and also a prediction of their potential. Rigorous assessment means that students' individual strengths and weaknesses are identified and worked on from the start. Through thorough analysis of assessments, the school identified a weakness in English at Key Stage 3 and an intervention programme has begun to remedy this. Care is taken to include the very few girls to share equal opportunities with the boys so that there is no significant variation in their achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding. This is largely due to the excellent care and support students are given from all staff. Students show how much they enjoy their education by improving their attendance and taking advantage of all the activities on offer. Behaviour during the inspection was good and whilst there are recorded incidents of disruptive behaviour, students on the whole are learning to manage their own behaviour well. The behaviour targets which students set for themselves, following discussion with their personal tutor, are monitored at each lesson. The points system enables the school to check the success, or otherwise, of these targets which are meticulously analysed. Gaining the Healthy Schools Award shows the high priority given to all aspects of health and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. A very strong emphasis is given to smoking cessation, the dangers of drugs and responsible citizenship. An extensive range of physical education activities promotes students' fitness and also gives them the chance to try out different sports. Regular circle times during the day bring students and staff together as a community to discuss how well the day is going. This supports the outstanding ethos which pervades all aspects of the school.

The school buildings are enhanced by students' artwork and photographs of various activities. Students proudly talk about these and decisions about how to improve the school are discussed in school council meetings. They think of others and are currently organising 'Christmas Child' boxes for disadvantaged children. The community project enables students to work with and help people in the local community. The extensive mix of topics, activities and visitors means that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features. This is because teachers have secure subject knowledge, have accurate assessment data and use this to plan effectively for individual needs. Good strategies to include students actively in lessons, means that they are engaged and motivated. Any low level disruptions are effectively dealt with without an interruption to others' learning. All staff who lead lessons have very positive relationships with students and know them well. Generally there is a good pace to lessons and humorous repartee between staff and students maintains a positive learning atmosphere. Dialogue between staff and students is good and encouraging, praising effort and good work. Occasionally, when lessons are mundane and lack vitality, students' attention wanders and opportunities for learning are limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students are offered an outstanding range of learning opportunities which supports their outstanding achievements and personal development. The curriculum coordinator makes every effort to ensure that the curriculum meets students' individual needs. With this in mind, links with another similar local special school are being developed to share curriculum expertise and so widen even further the learning opportunities for both groups of students. Literacy and numeracy are very well promoted, as is information and communication technology (ICT). The school day is well organised and time is very well used. PSHE lessons promote students' awareness of personal and social responsibility extremely well.

The extensive range of enrichment activities and after-school clubs adds another dimension to the school day. Students benefit enormously from these and the residential visits which all add to their personal development. Work experience is available and college courses give students a taster of what they might like to study when they leave. Moving on to a 16 to 19 special provision is another option and others move on to recognised training providers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students are given excellent quality care, guidance and support. Relationships between all adults and students are supportive and constructive, resulting in a very positive ethos. Parents overwhelmingly feel that their children are taught in a safe and secure environment and are well looked after. All safeguarding procedures are in place. Staff have a very good awareness of the difficulties some students face in their learning and in their personal lives so that any interventions are timely and appropriate to specific need. The recent introduction of a philosophy for children course (P4C) at Year 8 is proving to be an effective tool in encouraging students

to think about a wide range of important topics generated from their own discussions. Many external agencies are used to give both individual and group support. Tracking of students' progress is robust and regular which means that their individual learning and teaching plans are accurate and have challenging targets. Similarly, students' behaviour is extremely well tracked and monitored and, together, this information means that staff can give students the right support at the right time.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher and senior management team are evident in every area of the school. All staff are determined that students will benefit from what the school offers and it is this collective energy that drives the school forward. This is a school that does not stand still, but is always striving to find the best ways of meeting students' varying and changing needs. Because of this, the capacity to improve is outstanding. Senior managers know the school and students very well which results in highly accurate self-evaluation. Monitoring and reviewing of the work of the school are ongoing and the involvement of all staff means that they feel valued and have ownership of what they do. The system of peer mentoring/coaching new teachers and supporting the unqualified teachers is paying dividends in the classroom and this is one reason why students continue to achieve so well. Governors are very supportive and many visit regularly and, whilst they come to know the students and staff well, they recognise that they could make a more active contribution to monitoring and evaluating whole school effectiveness.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	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	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?	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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

21 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Springwell Dene School, Sunderland, SR3 4EE

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I really enjoyed my visit and was impressed by the way you behaved in lessons and towards each other. You told me that you think the school is good. In fact, your school is outstanding. All staff do everything they can to try and ensure that you have the very best education they can give. You are given excellent care and support to help you make the most of your time in school. Your parents/guardians think the same. You have great opportunities to try out an excellent range of sports, and going on work experience or to college lets you think about what you might do when you leave.

The teaching is good and this is why you achieve so well. I was impressed with the examination results that last year's students achieved and you can do the same if you continue to come to school regularly and work hard. However, there is some scope to improve your lessons so that they are always full of interest and help you to become fully involved in what you are learning. You get on well with staff because you know that they have your best interests at heart.

You have a school to be proud of. You can do your bit to keep it that way by continuing to work hard and behaving well.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Noreen Buckingham

Lead inspector