

Cavendish School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111497
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	310607
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Arif Hussain

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	77
6th form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Chisholm
Headteacher	Mrs Celia Dickinson
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	Lincoln Close Runcorn Cheshire WA7 4YX
Telephone number	01928 561706
Fax number	01928 566088

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for girls and boys who have statements of special educational need. The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties. One fifth has profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant proportion additionally has communication and language difficulties including autistic spectrum disorders. A minority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties or behaviour, emotional and social development needs. The proportion of pupils with more complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased since the last inspection. The great majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A good number of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school currently has 23 students of sixth form age. There are no children in the Foundation Stage. The school has achieved Investors in People status, the National Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark, Activemark and Artsmark (Gold) Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cavendish is a good school with some outstanding features. It provides good value for money. Representative views from parents include, 'I cannot praise the school enough for its care and support for my child. My son is very happy and doing well in everything.' Though standards are low owing to the severity of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes better. This ensures that pupils make good strides in their academic learning, including in communication, language, information and communication technology (ICT) and a good number of other areas. However, in the last year, achievement in numeracy has dipped below other areas of learning because the school has concentrated so heavily on promoting other basic skills. The school has developed an outstanding and imaginative curriculum which fully meets everyone's interests and needs. Pupils especially enjoy the practical and real life experiences on offer. This prepares them exceptionally well for the future.

The school's success is underpinned by extremely effective relationships with parents and the wider community. For instance, a good number of pupils regularly participate in mainstream school activities, demonstrating the school's strong commitment to inclusion.

Personal development is exceptional because pupils receive outstanding care, support and guidance from highly dedicated and skilled staff. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils become increasingly mature as they move up through the school. They are thoughtful, polite and exceptionally well behaved. Pupils, including those with challenging behaviour, respond particularly well to the constant praise and rewards for hard work and good achievement. Attendance is good. Absence is largely due to illness and there is no truancy. Pupils love school and this is reflected in excellent attitudes towards learning. They adopt healthy lifestyles particularly well through the Healthy Schools initiative and there is very enthusiastic participation in activities such as 'brain gym', many sports and hydrotherapy. Pupils say there is a good atmosphere in school and that they feel safe and free from bullying. Pupils' contribution to the community is outstanding. The school council provides pupils with a very strong voice and influence over school development. For instance, they have made an excellent contribution to the design of the new extension to the accommodation.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's push for excellence has been inspirational, and a key factor in the good improvements since the last inspection. Her enthusiasm has led to a common sense of purpose across the school. Senior and other managers have ensured that there is an extremely clear direction for the school. The governors are highly supportive. They hold the school to account well, for instance, regarding efficient staff deployment and financial management. Self-evaluation is generally good and the school has an accurate judgement of its overall effectiveness. The school's capacity for improvement is good. The headteacher acknowledges that, although positive improvements have been made since the last inspection, further improvement is needed to teaching in the whole school before all pupils can achieve as well as possible.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form students are grouped together with Key Stage 4 pupils and this is very effective. Provision is excellent and the curriculum provides very high levels of challenge for students.

Leadership and management are particularly effective and this has resulted in outstanding teaching and learning. In an excellent lesson involving pupils from Key Stage 4, the sixth form and pupils from a mainstream school, students achieved exceptionally well because the work was extremely well matched to their needs. The vast majority of students achieve exceptionally well and all students are successful in a good number of accredited courses by the time they leave. In the last school year these included recognising signs and symbols, independent living, food preparation and business administration. Personal development is excellent and students become very confident and independent in their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in numeracy across the school.
- Raise the quality of teaching across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils generally make good progress, regardless of their learning difficulties or ethnicity. Those with the most severe and complex difficulties move forward in very small steps but their achievements are just as good as those of other pupils. Communication and language development is always a strong focus in learning and so pupils make good progress in this area. The spoken word is often accompanied by signing or, the use of symbols, pictures and aids that enable pupils to understand and be understood. From Year 1 through to Year 11, pupils make good progress in reading and writing and very good progress in science. Pupils are able to start work on externally accredited courses of study from Year 7 onwards. Currently, a good number of pupils are making strong progress in modules such as self-awareness, multi-sensory skills, and the world around us, using ICT and current affairs. The great majority of pupils and students make satisfactory progress in numeracy. Many well planned opportunities to use computers throughout the school help pupils and students to develop good ICT skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' outstanding personal development makes an excellent contribution to their learning. Pupils develop self-esteem very quickly and mature into excellent young citizens. They accept responsibilities very positively and take great pride in carrying out monitor duties. The school council helps pupils to develop citizenship skills very effectively and learn about decision making and democracy. Pupils develop admirable values concerned with care, fairness and justice. A very good example of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development was seen in some recent written work done by Key Stage 3 pupils. They considered what motivates international businesses and made excellent points about greed, the exploitation of poor people and fair trade. Their writing also reveals that they have an excellent understanding and respect for different cultures and racial groups, as they considered the lives of people in America and India. Pupils learn to take some responsibility for their own safety, for example, as they use equipment in physical education and science lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Consequently, pupils make good progress. Pupils are taught how to use creative learning methods such as planning their work using symbols and key words. They enjoy this very much. Teachers engage pupils well through practical activities. For instance, in a science lesson about energy, all pupils used computers to develop their ideas. A few pupils also took turns to walk around school and take pictures of examples of wasted energy. Good procedures to manage behaviour ensure that pupils always stay on task and work hard. Teaching and support assistants generally play a strong part in the success of lessons, although, occasionally, they do not make enough of a contribution to the introductory part. Assessment is accurate. Teachers know pupils well and have a good understanding of their learning difficulties. Lesson planning is good on the whole, although it is not always clear what particular groups of pupils are to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is exceptional provision for literacy and ICT skills development. Opportunities to learn about personal care, independence, money, further education and jobs help all pupils to prepare especially well for the future. Pupils enjoy many sports including swimming, tennis and basketball. This makes a very good contribution to physical development. The school also offers a rich variety of after-school, weekend and holiday activities. Visits out of school are plentiful and support cultural development very well. Creativity in learning is effectively promoted through art, music and dance. Drama is often used to support the development of communication, language and personal skills. Opportunities to develop vocational skills through work-related learning and off-site training are very good. The school's curriculum for Key Stage 4 and beyond provides seamless and very flexible learning opportunities. This has a striking impact on social and emotional development and provides many opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents acknowledge that levels of care are a significant strength of the school. There is an excellent family ethos underpinned by very good relationships with pupils. Representative views from pupils include, 'I'm happy because I've got lots of friends. The teachers like me and if I get stuck with my work they always help me.' Academic guidance is very strong. Individual education plans are well detailed and include challenging targets for pupils. Praise, reward and encouragement are notable features of each lesson and successfully raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Physiotherapy and medical care are readily available and this contributes greatly to pupils' well-being. High levels of staff training ensure that pupils receive skilful and very

effective support. Arrangements to safeguard pupils and to ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare are rigorous and effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership of the school is successfully focused on raising standards and especially in promoting the personal development and well-being of pupils. Managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through effective self-evaluation, which takes into account the views of the governing body, parents and pupils. Since the last inspection, the school has made notable progress in terms of the curriculum and the support it offers pupils. In the last year, the school has emerged from a difficult period in its life where accommodation and unavoidable staffing difficulties caused a slight blip in its performance. In particular, the checking of pupils' progress and achievement in numeracy suffered and leaders have only very recently begun to improve this. Improvements to the accommodation are now well underway. Prudent deployment of staff and good training has addressed the staffing matters. Inclusion lies at the heart of the school's work and the school is effective in removing barriers to this. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis with office staff making an excellent contribution. Resources such as electronic whiteboards are well used to support learning. The school deservedly has a very good reputation in the community.

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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	16-19
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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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed meeting you. This letter is to tell you some of the things I found out about your school.

You told me how happy you are at school. This is because the teachers and other adults make sure you are safe and provide lots of exciting things for you to do. You know what you need to do in order to be healthy and safe. Your behaviour is excellent and you are extremely good citizens. I was very impressed with the work of the school council and the way they help everyone. Well done!

You have good teachers and this is why you all learn so well. The school is helping you in many ways to make sure you are ready to leave school when the time comes. The oldest pupils and students gain lots of certificates for their work. Well done!

The headteacher, staff and governors all work very hard to make sure you all keep learning well. Your parents and carers think that Cavendish is a good school and I agree with them!

I have asked the school to make teaching even better, especially in numeracy so that this is as good as your literacy and computer work!