

Cedar Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115457
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311939
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Fred Branch
Headteacher	Mr Peter Whelan
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2004
School address	Hart Road Thundersley Benfleet Essex SS7 3UQ
Telephone number	01268774723
Fax number	01268776604

Age group	4-16
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2007
Inspection number	311939

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and additional needs. The majority have moderate learning difficulties. A small minority have an autistic spectrum disorder. A few pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties. A small number have language and communication difficulties or a hearing impairment. As a result of their learning difficulties pupils' attainment on entry is very low. Nearly all pupils are White British. The school serves a socially diverse community in which there is some socio-economic disadvantage. Six pupils are looked after by their local authorities.

The school is one of five taking part in a Community Learning Partnership in which it provides outreach support for primary and secondary schools in the area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cedar Hall School is a good school which provides good value for money. Effective leadership and management, the vision of the headteacher in particular, has meant the school has not stood still in its pursuit of high quality educational provision. Governors and parents have played an effective part in this mission. Alongside the headteacher, governors have supported careful financial planning. Together with parents they have, on many occasions, raised extra funds and resources that have improved the school. The whole school is unified by the clear sense of purpose which creates a positive ethos in which pupils thrive personally and academically. Care, guidance and support for pupils is good. They develop self-confidence, independence and a strong sense of responsibility. This leads to them being safe and to contributing generously to school life and beyond.

The school's self-evaluation almost entirely agrees with inspection judgements. However, the effectiveness with which self-evaluation leads to improvement is satisfactory. It is not better because nearly all of this work is carried out by the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Heads of departments and curriculum leaders are not sufficiently involved in gaining first-hand knowledge of how well their areas of responsibility are functioning. Procedures for keeping track of pupils' progress are in place but do not lead to the depth of analysis required to highlight where and when pupils' progress is slowing down. Therefore, the school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

The curriculum is good as it responds well to pupils' interests and learning difficulties, which adds much to their enjoyment of school. It is greatly enriched with many additional activities, sports in particular. These occur over lunchtimes, after school, at weekends and in holiday periods. Good attention to a balanced diet and enthusiasm for sports are important contributions to pupils adopting healthy lifestyles. Physical education, design and technology, art and music are strengths. The well-employed facilities for information and communication technology are a good improvement since the last inspection.

The school provides well for the wide range of learning difficulties and capabilities of its pupils. Strong links with the community, professional agencies, schools and colleges ensure there is a wide pool of expertise to complement that already within school for meeting pupils' needs. The school shares its expertise with local primary and secondary schools in good outreach provision.

Throughout the school, teaching and learning are good. The primary department stands out as excellent for its success with pupils, as a result of its rigorous and skilful work. Pupils' progress in the primary department is exceptional because their targets and work are very sharply focused. High quality assessment enables learning activities to be challenging and pitched precisely at each pupils' capabilities.

While most lessons in the middle and secondary departments are good, and occasionally outstanding, the quality of teaching is inconsistent and the impact here is in pupils having periods of slow progress. This has arisen largely because lessons are not observed with sufficient frequency and rigour. Nevertheless, across the middle and secondary departments, pupils make sufficient progress to achieve well by the end of Year 11, when they leave school. They have a good range of courses that are externally accredited and examination results each year are impressive. Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy and, added to their many experiences of work-related learning, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- Eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching and learning in the middle and secondary departments and ensure all pupils here are appropriately challenged by their work.
- Increase the involvement of as many of the school community as possible in rigorously monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the end of Year 11, pupils achieve impressive examination results in a good number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, which is a measure of good progress. In 2007, as in previous years, several pupils gained GCSE passes in mathematics and art. Many more achieved the highest level possible in Entry Level Certificates and in mathematics in particular. There were good results also in English, science and design and technology. All of these successes, alongside the generally good progress towards targets throughout the school, are the result of much good and some outstanding teaching. In the primary department, in particular, pupils are making excellent progress because teaching and assessment are of the highest quality.

Inconsistency in the quality of teaching in the middle and secondary departments occasionally slows the rate of pupils' progress, although this is mostly recovered by the end of Year 11 by the greater proportion of good teaching. The analysis undertaken of pupils' performance is not highlighting sufficiently the differences in their progress in subjects, classes or in relation to their learning difficulties.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development, including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Using strong links with the local community, pupils' horizons are widened to include, in particular, their awareness of cultural diversity. These links also help to increase pupils' independence and give them essential skills in coping with everyday demands. An increasing number of pupils travel to school on their own. Attendance is good. Pupils make their own good contribution to the community with performances by the choir and through fund-raising work in particular. Pupils get on well with staff. Good relationships make for a happy atmosphere in which pupils feel and act safely. Behaviour is good and effective approaches with those who have difficulty in behaving well means they respond positively. Pupils have a strong element of healthy lifestyle as a result of the school's good support and encouragement. Good progress in personal development, good achievement and the many experiences from work-related learning all add towards good preparation for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are exceptionally strong in the primary department. Teachers are very effective in using their substantial expertise to meet pupils' needs. They plan each individual's learning opportunities with considerable detail and accuracy. Assessment in the primary department is highly refined and used very well in setting pupils challenging work. In the middle

school and secondary departments, a good proportion of teaching is well, and sometimes exceedingly well, planned and matched to pupils' needs and this results in some excellent learning. It stands out as outstanding in physical education, design technology and music where teachers' subject expertise and enthusiasm really motivates and engages pupils.

However, some teaching in the middle and secondary departments lacks the strengths found in many lessons. In these few instances, learning objectives are not made sufficiently clear in lesson planning and are not shared effectively with pupils. This leads to insufficient time at the end of lessons to assess with pupils what they have learnt. Equally, the assessment of pupils' progress is not being used effectively to set appropriately challenging work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets legal requirements and is particularly relevant to the wide range of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In this respect the primary curriculum is excellent. Pupils across the school have access to a good range of interesting work and activities. Physical education, design and technology, music and art stand out as particular strengths of provision because of the high degree of teachers' subject expertise and all staff make significant contributions to pupils' personal development. Likewise, the opportunities for older pupils to have residential experiences increase their self-confidence and independence. In addition, the good range of examination courses in Years 10 and 11, work experience and college courses contribute well towards pupils' good preparation for the future.

Lively, well-attended lunchtime clubs, music and sports enrich the curriculum well and contribute much to pupil's enjoyment and achievement. Many pupils take part regularly in sporting and other activities, which successfully promote their healthy lifestyles, team work and decision making skills. The weakness in information and communication technology, highlighted by the previous inspection, has been fully addressed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strong commitment to pupils' welfare and some excellent provision for their care promotes personal development effectively. The school has established procedures for safeguarding pupils and child protection arrangements are securely in place. Staff are effective in promoting good behaviour and in creating an atmosphere in which pupils learn to care for and respect one another. Good relationships lead to happy, well-supported pupils who enjoy school considerably.

Pupils are often encouraged and given the confidence that helps them to make good efforts with their work. There is an excellent regime of celebrating achievements. Most teachers and classroom assistants use their good knowledge of pupils to support their progress in lessons. Where good practice in sharing targets with pupils and using targets in lessons is inconsistent, this detracts from the good progress pupils usually make. Pupils are guided well on choosing further education and career pathways when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has firmly established a strong and positive ethos which permeates the work of the school. The school's aims and values are widely understood and appreciated. The primary department has developed an outstandingly clear direction that has ensured the highest quality of support for pupils, leading to them making excellent progress. A clear direction on preparing pupils for leaving school has meant good provision to equip them well with qualifications, independence and employment skills. As a result, the school has a built good reputation in the community and receives great praise from both parents and pupils. A particular strength of leadership is found in the determination of the headteacher, governors and parents to attract many additional resources for the school by winning grants, through fund-raising and gaining sponsorships. This has led to much refurbishing of the accommodation and adding to educational facilities such as information and communication technology. Governors play an effective part in fulfilling their duties and supporting school improvement, especially through astute financial planning at a time when annual budgets need careful balancing.

A well-conceived process of self-evaluation is developing and at this stage its effectiveness is satisfactory. The extent to which the school's work is monitored and evaluated is too limited. This has been undertaken largely by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, but without the scope and rigour needed. The evaluations of teaching have not been sufficiently incisive to highlight where teaching is less effective in promoting learning. Other leaders, such as departmental heads and curriculum co-ordinators, have too few opportunities for making systematic checks on the quality of the school's work.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
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	3
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

19 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cedar Hall School, Thundersley, Benfleet, Essex, SS7 3UQ

We enjoyed thoroughly our visit to your school. Thank you for welcoming us and being so friendly. We greatly appreciated the School Council sparing time to share their views about school. We left with the strong impression you all enjoy school very much.

We found out there are many good things about your school. We were extremely impressed with the primary department and saw pupils there making excellent progress. Your progress in the middle and secondary departments is good. We thought examination results were impressive. What stood out most were physical education, design and technology, music and art. We were pleased to see you being confident, independent and well-behaved pupils.

There was not much we found that your headteacher needed to improve. We said that while most lessons were good a few could be better, particularly by explaining clearly what you would learn and what your targets are. We felt it would help also if all teachers shared with you equally well what progress you are making and what you can do to improve.

We also said to your headteacher that he, and all the staff, should regularly keep a close check that this is done well in every one of your lessons.

You can help by continuing with your good efforts in class and around the school.

We wish you every success for the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead Inspector