

Isebrook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122157
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314224
Inspection date	5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Dalton
Headteacher	Peter Henshaw
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2005
School address	Eastleigh Road Kettering NN15 6PT
Telephone number	01536 500030
Fax number	01536 503298

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Isebrook is a secondary special school for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, attainment on entry is exceptionally low. Around a quarter of students have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and an equal proportion experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Whilst most students transfer from specialist primary provision at eleven-plus, a small but increasingly significant number arrive, unpredictably, as the result of exclusion from mainstream schools. There is a discrete provision for some of the ASD students who require a highly structured environment for the majority of their day. The school is officially designated for the 11-16 age range, but a very recent innovation this term has been a small pilot post-16 class for students at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET), but likely to access further education elsewhere within three years. Students' backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of Kettering and the wider county communities and there are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are more than twice as many boys as girls. The school works within a number of partnership school groupings and provides outreach support to schools across the county on an increasingly formalised basis.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Isebrook is a good school that has improved considerably since its last inspection. The headteacher's strong visionary leadership has encouraged hard work and dedication from the whole staff team. This has resulted in many thoughtful and successful changes and improvements to the way things are done and to the environment in which students and staff work so well together. Imaginative extensions and refurbishments to the buildings and outside environment have helped to make the school an attractive and calm place to be in. Most importantly, however, well-focused interventions and support have ensured that teaching and learning are now consistently good. This has, in turn, resulted in students making good progress and achieving well in the increased number of courses they have studied by the time they leave. This is particularly so for students with ASD, who benefit from the outstanding teaching they receive in the specialist provision or when they are included very successfully in the wider school community.

All students are very clear about how much they enjoy being in school, and their good attendance and behaviour are testament to this. Some have had unhappy experiences in their previous mainstream schools. They and their parents say how much more positive and successful they are since going to Isebrook. One parent spoke for many when she wrote that her daughter 'has come on leaps and bounds and her confidence has grown'. Students told inspectors that they feel safe and secure because they are sure staff will always look after them and deal quickly and sensitively with any difficulties they might have. Their personal development and self-esteem are good, as a result of the exceptionally high quality pastoral support they receive. Students are, however, not yet sufficiently involved in negotiating their own targets and evaluating progress towards meeting them. Perhaps the most important reason for the school's effectiveness is the seamless teamwork between teachers, their able assistants and the many other staff and professionals that visit and support individual students.

The good curriculum provides engaging opportunities for students to study a full range of subjects and experience many relevant activities that prepare them well for their adult lives. Very good use is made of the wider community, and, where appropriate, students can study those subjects in which they have particular strengths alongside their mainstream peers. The school's approach to assessing students' achievements has been much improved, but there is still some way to go before the information that is gathered is utilised fully in planning. Good progress has been made in a short time to establish the pilot post-16 class. An appropriate curriculum is being developed, and students are happy and settled there. There are clear signs that this facility, ultimately planned to provide for eight students, will quickly match the quality of the main school's provision, but it is too early to judge its effectiveness or indeed students' progress.

The headteacher has built a strong leadership team of able colleagues whose collective skills and expertise are employed to good effect. The school has a realistic view of itself and knows its strengths and areas for development well. Governors provide properly focused support and challenge and the efficient administrative staff ensure that the school runs smoothly. Consequently, the school has a strong capacity to continue improving.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that the wealth of evidence that is already collected about students' performance is used consistently and more effectively to demonstrate their progress over time and inform teachers' planning of the next steps in learning
- make better arrangements to enable students to be more involved in their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Whilst standards in the school are significantly below average because of students' learning difficulties, students nonetheless make good progress in their learning and achieve well in their studies. All groups achieve equally well when their particular needs are taken into account. A lot of productive work has been done to ensure that the school can now gather and analyse its assessment data about students' achievements confidently and accurately, but the information is not yet used fully to track and compare their progress. Older students gain impressive results in accredited courses, preparing them well for further study or training beyond school. Good arrangements have been made to ensure that higher-attaining students with ASD meet their full potential.

The progress made in lessons is good. Students are not always helped to understand and value their achievements against identified objectives, although the school does celebrate good work publicly through awards and high quality, informative displays all round the buildings. Some of the artwork displayed was particularly impressive. Individual education plans are becoming more relevant in providing challenging targets for students to work towards, and they rise to these challenges well, particularly when they relate to their personal development. Students with ASD are helped very successfully to develop coping strategies to overcome their anxiety, which then enable them to benefit fully from the highly structured learning opportunities provided for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Excellent pastoral care ensures students really enjoy school. Their social and moral development is very good, so that they are considerate of the needs and rights of others. Spiritual and cultural sensitivities are nurtured well through active links with other countries, raising charitable funds and through work in the expressive arts. Relationships are very good between students and with staff, who provide good role models. Strong involvement in the local community also enables students to develop their self-esteem, independence skills and awareness of citizenship. Behaviour is good across the school, and improves significantly in many cases due to well-focused support and consistent management by all staff. Most students are considerate, confident and polite. They enjoy their lessons, meeting their friends and joining after-school clubs. In class, students learn to work more independently, though they have limited opportunities to work together and discuss their work with each other. They are well informed about healthy living and are keen, for the most part, to eat healthily and take exercise. Although some girls do not enjoy physical education lessons, some are now joining after-school clubs involving exercise. The school council discusses students' concerns and provides good opportunities for students to contribute to school decision-making, for example by playing an active part in the appointment of the assistant headteacher. Students are well prepared for their future, engaging

happily in work experience and college link courses and developing numeracy and literacy skills appropriate to their needs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Improvements in the quality of teaching have resulted from very effective coaching and mentoring by senior managers and successful recruitment of new staff. Well-planned and delivered continuing professional development has ensured that all staff have the requisite skills to meet the full range of students' needs. The impressive specialist and whole-school provision for ASD students is particularly noteworthy. Good planning of engaging practical activities motivates students in their learning, helping them to achieve well. Active participation is expected of students, thus ensuring a good pace in lessons. Highly effective teamwork, with teaching assistants providing sensitive and encouraging support, helps to maximise learning opportunities. Planning for all activities, learning materials and teaching approaches is generally effective, although it does not always take full account of the diverse abilities and learning styles in the class. New approaches to assessment and moderation of judgements have helped to establish a common understanding about levels of achievement across all subjects, but this knowledge is not being used consistently or thoroughly enough in planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

All students are provided with full access to a good range of learning activities, which are mostly well adapted to meet individual needs. Planning is generally good, due to strong overall leadership and developing expertise in subject co-ordinators. All students have the opportunity to have their achievements accredited across a wide range of courses, and arrangements are well advanced to provide the same entitlement for the post-16 group. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students' personal development. Wide-ranging well-planned after-school, outdoor and residential activities help develop their social and independence skills. The school makes very good use of the wider community, and outside groups and organisations are welcomed into the school to use its facilities. Some students follow courses at local schools and most attend link courses at colleges of further education. The school participates actively in, and sometimes hosts, joint activities, such as arts weeks with a local group of schools. All students learn work skills through successful work experience placements, which are individually tailored to suit their needs. Many are rightly proud of how well they do in these settings and providers are often complimentary about how well students adapt and settle in these potentially stressful situations. Provision of opportunities to extend literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects is well thought through and effective. Considerable investment has been made in information and communication technology equipment, and staff are now beginning to make better use of computers and interactive whiteboards to enhance teaching and learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care and support provided for students are outstanding. Staff know and support students very well, and this contributes significantly to students' positive attitude to learning and good achievements. Absence is closely monitored and individual issues followed up with

the support of local authority professionals, so that attendance has improved. Short-term exclusions have been used judiciously in the past, according to agreed criteria, and this has resulted in far fewer exclusions in the current year. Active and supportive partnerships are nurtured with parents so that they are closely involved in supporting their child's progress. Parents are very appreciative of this aspect of the school's work. Procedures for safeguarding students are rigorous and effective. Students who have significant health needs are carefully monitored and are very well supported by external agencies, working in productive partnership with school staff in excellent facilities. A cross-curricular individual education plan target is agreed at annual reviews, and all staff are involved in monitoring and supporting each student's progress towards it. There are good procedures in place to determine what students can do, but these are not used consistently or to best effect to help involve students in their learning and plan their next steps in learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has been very successful in leading and motivating the whole school community to be reflective about what it does well and how it can do some things even more effectively. The school's approach to monitoring its work and students' outcomes is thorough and comprehensive, so that it can plan any necessary improvements on the basis of accurate evaluations. The sense of teamwork is strong across the school. Recent developments have created a very effective senior leadership group, with discrete areas of management responsibility and a shared commitment to achieve the clearly expressed aims and ambitions of the school. This has been demonstrated by the continuing successful development of the pastoral care system. Another example has been the recognition by the local authority, through specific funding, to extend the school's already well-respected outreach work in order to share the considerable expertise that the school has developed in meeting the needs of students with ASD. Subject leaders are also being helped to have an increasing responsibility for, and influence on, the quality of teaching, learning and the curricular provision in their subject. Their effectiveness in this is, as yet, inconsistent and not fully realised. Teaching assistants are supported and encouraged to develop their own skills, and take on a greater share in planning for and providing students' education. Consequently, the whole staff team feel empowered and recognise their greater accountability. Governors are also fully involved in this process of continuous improvement. They visit the school regularly and ensure that they are well informed about its work. This enables them to ask the right questions, evaluate responses critically and provide appropriate collaborative support and encouragement as required.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	1
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	2
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

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and talking so openly about how you feel about your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing all your work, some of which, particularly your art, really impressed us. We agree with you that you go to a good school.

Some of the things we liked about your school

- You all receive a good education and are cared for exceptionally well.
- You all enjoy going to school very much. Some of you who had sad experiences in other schools have been helped a lot to feel much more positive about learning – and yourselves.
- You are well behaved and respectful of others.
- Your teachers and support staff work very well together to make sure your lessons are interesting and enable you to do your best.
- The arrangements made for those of you with autism are outstanding. This helps you to develop ways of coping with your difficulties so that you can be successful in your studies.
- You appreciate the wide range of things you can do in school, including the clubs.
- Your headteacher has made a very real difference to your school because he has helped all the staff to work well together and make things better.
- Your parents are very happy with what the school does for you.
- You are well prepared for life after school.

We thought the school could be even better if

- teachers use what they know about your individual progress better when planning your work
- you are more involved in setting your own targets and thinking about how well you are getting on with them.



6 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Isebrook School, Kettering, NN15 6PT

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Yours sincerely

Steven Parker
Lead inspector