

Dawn House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122956
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LA
Inspection number	314439
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	88
6th form	27
Appropriate authority	The proprietor Mr Sean Nesbitt
Headteacher	Ms Anne Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Helmsley Road Rainworth Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG21 0DQ
Telephone number	01623 795361
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Age group	5–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with severe and complex communication and interaction difficulties. It is one of two schools owned and run by the national charity I CAN. Many pupils have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorders. Currently, the youngest pupils are in Year 4. The school's sixth form is known as the Further Education (FE) department. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that all are working at levels below those of most pupils in mainstream schools. Almost all pupils are White British. There are three times as many boys as girls. Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities when their needs cannot be met by local schools. Their homes may be throughout the United Kingdom. The school offers residential accommodation to pupils who live too far away to travel on a daily basis. Currently, 38 pupils are weekly boarders. A few of the FE students stay in the residence on alternate weekends. Day pupils have opportunities to stay overnight or to join evening activities. The residential setting is inspected by Ofsted's Children's Directorate. The most recent social care inspection took place in November 2007. In September 2007, the school became a specialist school in the area of communication and interaction. It has gained Investors in People status. A Communication Skills Centre was opened in September 2007 to provide independent specialist advice to local authorities and parents.

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 with many outstanding features. 'I'm glad I came here', remarked one boy and 'It's brilliant!' said another. Both comments reflect pupils' enormous enjoyment of school. The excellent relationships they share with staff are a significant factor in their outstanding personal development. Pupils' self-confidence soars in the climate of praise and encouragement. This enables them to successfully take on challenges such as leading assemblies or serving in a shop as they experience the world of work. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils, going to great lengths to ensure their safety and wellbeing. To help prepare pupils for their future lives, they are strongly encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own safety. For example, after staff have carefully assessed and minimised potential risks, pupils learn how to be safe pedestrians and to use public transport independently. They are well aware of the components of a healthy lifestyle, supported by a very effective programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) within the outstanding curriculum. Year 8 pupils' new year resolutions include a pledge to 'eat fruit and vegetables every day' and the wide-ranging opportunities to be physically active are very popular during the school day and in the residential setting.

Pupils throughout the school achieve well because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers pay consistent attention to each pupil's communication and interaction difficulties following advice from therapists, who are frequently present in lessons to provide focused support. Some aspects of teaching are less consistent. Most lessons involve changes of activity so pupils have opportunities to learn in different ways, such as through discussions or by using tools and equipment. On other occasions, activities are prolonged or pupils may spend too long listening to adults.

The school demonstrates vividly its understanding of the links between pupils' achievement and personal development and their particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In order to help pupils achieve as much as they can, teaching, therapy and residential care staff work together very closely. 'Core teams' overseeing each pupil's learning and welfare are central to monitoring all aspects of their progress and ensuring that their changing needs are met as they move up through the school. This same model of partnership extends to the school's senior team and adds significantly to its good leadership and management. The headteacher plays a pivotal coordinating role with the result that the leaders of all staff groups share the same high expectations and contribute fully to the school's good capacity to continue to improve. Senior staff do not use teachers' assessments of pupils' learning effectively enough yet when planning whole-school developments. For example, they do not make systematic enough comparisons between different subjects in order to identify any aspects that may be weaker than others. The school's newly acquired specialist status has already had an impact on pupils' opportunities. For instance, the range of accreditation has been extended. Links with the community are developing well, with specialist support offered to local schools. Dawn House is entirely committed to enabling every pupil to be a fulfilled and valued member of society. In the words of one parent, this school 'never gives up on a child'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students achieve well in the FE department. Teaching is good. Students are successful in a wide range of academic and vocational accredited courses. In addition to certificates in basic

and key skills such as speaking and listening and information and communication technology (ICT) individuals gain accreditation in areas as diverse as beauty therapy, animal care and PC systems support. Very close links with the local college of FE allow the curriculum to offer particularly effective arrangements for students to pursue their interests and career aspirations. Increasingly, courses such as NVQ horticulture are delivered in the workplace, providing exceptional opportunities to enhance students' personal development and prepare them for life beyond school. Therapists are heavily involved in ensuring students' needs are met. Students who use the residential provision benefit significantly from learning valuable life skills such as washing their clothes, shopping, and filling their leisure time. The department is led and managed well.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 8

The boarding provision is good and meets the Department of Health's national minimum standards for residential special schools. A particular strength is the way in which residential care staff work in very close partnership with teaching staff and therapists to help pupils achieve well and enjoy what they do. Varied and interesting activities include weekly house meetings during which pupils plan how they will spend Thursday evenings. For example, they might decide to go swimming or to stay in and watch a film. The small number of girls have planned opportunities to socialise together as well as with boys. There are good arrangements to promote healthy lifestyles. For instance, pupils learn to plan and cook meals. Pupils are strongly encouraged to take on responsibilities. As a result, Year 11 pupils run a youth club for younger ones. The most recent social care inspection made a few recommendations related to the way in which some records are maintained. The school has either attended to these already or is dealing with them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lessons always include varied activities and approaches to learning.
- Use assessments of pupils' learning more effectively to help identify strengths and weaknesses across the school and to plan for any necessary improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' good achievement is reflected in the high proportion of individual targets they meet. From the primary years onwards, they make particularly good progress in communication skills. Progress is also striking in mathematics. Last year, around two thirds of the Year 11 pupils gained GCSE passes in mathematics. Pupils of that age are successful in a range of subjects at GCSE or Entry level. For example, in 2007, all Year 11 pupils gained Entry level certificates in information and communication technology (ICT). They also achieved the Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) youth award at bronze level. There is no evidence that any groups of pupils achieve less well than do others. For example, the relatively small number of girls and the very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well. Pupils with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as autistic spectrum disorders, make good progress because their needs are understood and catered for well. It is too soon to

judge the impact of specialist school status on achievement and standards. The specialist school targets related to pupils' achievement are suitably challenging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils behave well even though a number of them find it hard to control their emotions and responses, owing to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Importantly, they often make very good progress in learning to manage their own behaviour and to conduct themselves sensibly in school and when out and about. Attendance compares well to that in other special schools and reflects pupils' enthusiasm for school. They particularly enjoy art and physical education, college courses and the visits organised for boarders. They also take great pleasure in each other's company, one recent arrival noting that 'I have many friends now'. Pupils work together well, for instance, to put on performances such as 'Grease'. The school council is influential, successfully lobbying for changes to school meals and for better lighting so outdoor activity areas can be used in the evening. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Together with their good achievement in key areas, this contributes significantly to preparing pupils exceptionally well for the next stage in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

A major strength is the very close partnership between teachers, teaching assistants and therapists. This is particularly effective in developing each pupil's communication skills and managing their behaviour, because staff agree approaches to use and apply them consistently. Good systems are in place to collect information about each pupil's progress. For the most part teachers use this well in order to match work closely to different pupils' levels of attainment, for example, providing extra challenge for the faster learners. ICT is often used well to motivate pupils and support their work in a range of subjects. In an English lesson, pupils in Years 5 and 6 learned extremely well through a sequence of carefully chosen tasks that were changed before they had time to lose interest. Not all lessons contain this variety and learning slows down in these instances.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's clear focus on developing pupils' communication skills is central to planning in all subjects, supported by the heavy involvement of therapists. The curriculum is adapted very well to suit pupils' ages and learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but always with a strong emphasis on English, mathematics and PSHCE. The head of therapy monitors pupils' withdrawal from lessons for therapies, ensuring that they receive their entitlement to the full range of subjects. Primary aged pupils spend most of their time with their class teacher, enabling links between subjects to be made more easily and learning consolidated. Work-related learning is a strength in Years 10 and 11. Pupils opt for college courses, for example, in fabrication and

welding, and take part in work placements. These experiences contribute particularly well to pupils' communication skills and personal development. An excellent range of activities outside lessons enhances learning and promotes enjoyment. For instance, highly enjoyable lunchtime clubs are offered in areas such as ICT or craft.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Child protection procedures are well organised and effective and government safeguarding requirements are met in full. Staff induction arrangements and regular updates maintain this high standard. Health and safety policies and their implementation are monitored rigorously. Vulnerable pupils are cared for very well because the core teams keep a close eye on them. When necessary they intervene with additional support, for example, by involving the learning mentor, art therapist or parent and community liaison officer. A wide range of professionals and agencies enhance the work of school staff. Connexions advisers, notably from the area local to the school, provide valuable help in preparing pupils for work experience, college and leaving school. Very good, sensitive support is provided for girls, advising them on personal and social issues and encouraging them to be assertive and confident. Pupils set their own 'Worth a mention' targets and track their progress towards meeting goals such as waiting for a good time to speak.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher's strong leadership ensures that the school is ambitious and focused on continued improvement. Systems to monitor and evaluate its work are good and have accurately identified strengths and weaker areas although assessments of pupils' learning are not yet analysed rigorously enough for this purpose. The specialist school targets are challenging and the school is on track to achieve those set for the end of the current year. The school's plans for improving what it provides and pupils' achievement are effective. All staff groups and pupils are involved in establishing priorities. The recently opened communication skills centre is already strengthening links with the community and providing opportunities for staff to enhance their skills. Governors are well informed and prepared to challenge the senior team. The expertise of individual governors is put to good use, for example, to support recent developments in ICT systems.

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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	2
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?	2	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2	
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	2
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	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	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	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

23 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Dawn House School, Rainworth, NG21 0DQ

Thank you for being so helpful when we visited Dawn House. We really enjoyed our short time with you. This letter is to let you know what we found out about the school.

Dawn House is a good school with many outstanding features. One of the very best things about it is the way in which you all grow into confident young men and women, ready to move on when you leave school. Your personal development is outstanding and you should be very proud of this. The good quality residential part of the school helps the boarders learn to be independent.

We are also extremely impressed with the curriculum the school provides. It includes important aspects such as work experience and college courses for the older pupils. Therapists provide plenty of help for everyone. You told us that you feel safe in school and this is because the staff care for you exceptionally well.

You learn a lot and the oldest pupils and Further Education students all gain certificates to show how well they have done. This is all because teaching is good. We have asked the school to make sure that all lessons have plenty of different activities, so you stay interested and learn as well as possible. The teachers collect a great deal of information about how fast you are making progress. We want your headteacher and the senior staff to look at this even more carefully in order to help them find ways to make your school even better.

We would like to send our best wishes to each of you.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector