

Nethergate School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122958
Local Authority	CITY OF NOTTINGHAM LA
Inspection number	314440
Inspection dates	7–8 February 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	Community
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Gillian Reynolds
Headteacher	Mrs Sheila Johnson-Marshall
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Swansdowne Drive Clifton Nottingham NG11 8HX
Telephone number	0115 9152959
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized special school. It caters for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The largest proportion of pupils have moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Others have autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, severe learning difficulties, or speech, language and communication difficulties. The majority have more than one learning difficulty and/or disability identified on their statement of special educational need. One third of the pupils have additional medical conditions. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that they work at levels much lower than the expectations for their age. Most pupils join the school between the ages of 11 and 14 often following unsuccessful experiences of mainstream education. Currently there are no pupils under the age of seven. Few pupils are of minority ethnic origin. Although their home circumstances are varied, many pupils have disadvantaged backgrounds. Pupils travel to the school from a wide geographical area including parts of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools gold award. The local authority intends to close the school and merge it with another MLD school as part of the reorganisation of its special schools.

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. It has several outstanding features. Pupils' immense enjoyment of school is summed up by one boy's declaration that 'We love this place!' Pupils' outstanding personal development leads parents to describe their children as having 'blossomed' and being 'transformed' during their time at Nethergate. Their comments come to life as the whole school sings 'The World's Greatest' with utter conviction, full of confidence and with sky-high self-esteem. In response to the increasing number of pupils joining the school with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, the headteacher appointed a behaviour manager. This far-sighted decision has led directly to excellent standards of behaviour which enable all pupils to relax and concentrate on learning and having fun. Staff know each pupil's personal circumstances and pay extremely close attention to their welfare. This exceptional pastoral care is a notable feature of the outstanding care, support and guidance the school provides. As a result, pupils feel very safe in school. They are adamant that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if they have any concerns whatsoever. As one pupil remarked, 'Things get sorted out at this school'.

Pupils make good progress and achieve well; by Year 11, all have gained accreditation in a wide range of their work, including some who gain GCSEs. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Topics are chosen carefully to suit pupils' ages and interests, thereby motivating them to learn. Teachers identify clearly what they intend different groups of pupils to learn in the course of each lesson. They do not consistently make the best use of these targets. Sometimes, for instance, activities or resources do not enable certain pupils to meet their goals for a particular lesson. Learning slows down on these occasions.

The outstanding curriculum is geared to supporting all aspects of pupils' development. For example, a visit by firefighters was enormously enjoyable but also had a serious side, helping pupils to appreciate the dangers of playing with matches and fire. Pupils take part enthusiastically in all manner of physical activities, such as swimming, orienteering, horse-riding and break-dancing. They demonstrate a very impressive commitment to staying fit and healthy. Meaningful opportunities abound for pupils to learn about the world of work. As a result, they are able to make informed decisions such as, 'I'd like to have a practical job when I leave school'.

Staff carefully assess the levels at which pupils are working as they move up through the school. At present, the headteacher analyses this information in order to identify any trends across the school. This enables her to point out where aspects of learning need to be improved and to hold discussions about how this is to be achieved. Teachers responsible for leading subjects are not sufficiently involved in sharing this work and hence improving teaching and learning. The school is well led and managed overall but the headteacher's leadership is outstanding. Her determination to provide as well as possible for every pupil translates into actions that keep the school moving forward. Despite its uncertain future, this momentum shows no sign of slowing down, providing Nethergate with good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching consistently enables all pupils to meet the targets set for them within lessons.
- Involve staff with subject responsibilities more in analysing assessments of pupils' learning and identifying where and how to make improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Teachers set pupils challenging targets to achieve in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils make good progress towards meeting these. During 2007, progress was particularly rapid in science, following improvements to the curriculum. Pupils make very good progress in ICT because they have plenty of opportunities to learn and practise their skills. The school has recently started to calculate the percentage of individual targets met by pupils. This analysis also indicates good progress and achievement. Girls and boys of all abilities achieve equally well as do the small numbers from minority ethnic groups. Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties often achieve remarkably well because dramatic improvements in their behaviour enable them to benefit from lessons and keep up with course work. By the end of Year 11, all pupils have gained external accreditation in a very wide range of aspects of their work. For example, they are successful in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network Youth Award scheme up to the silver level. Last year, five pupils gained GCSE passes in art including one B grade.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' infectious enthusiasm shines through and is reflected in above average attendance rates. They develop a very strong social conscience and their contribution to the school and wider community is exceptional. For example, pupils readily take on tasks such as 'befriending' and membership of the school council. A 'school nutrition action group' publicises healthy eating and successfully lobbied for water to be freely available during lessons. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' knowledge of themselves is seen clearly in the personal targets they choose, for example, 'If I'm getting angry I should find a teacher before I lose my temper'. Organising events such as a coffee afternoon for adults from a day centre help pupils develop important skills such as working together, managing a budget, and being sociable. They are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage in their lives. With great maturity, a Year 11 pupil commented 'I've enjoyed school but I'm not nervous about my future'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils are confident to learn new skills or ask for help and they heed the advice they are given. Teaching assistants often make very strong contributions to lessons and learning. They take care not to do too much for pupils. On the contrary, pupils are encouraged to be independent and to support each other. Teachers are still establishing how best to use the targets they set for pupils to achieve during each lesson. For example, pupils are often told what each of them should learn, helping to focus their efforts on this next step forward. Occasionally, lessons do not allow some groups, such as lower attainers, to demonstrate new learning because resources and tasks are not adapted to meet their needs. There are good systems to measure each pupil's progress, for instance, by checking if they have met the targets set at annual reviews and in individual education plans.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets pupils' needs at each stage in their development. For example, the primary aged pupils often learn through topics that draw subjects together and help pupils to consolidate their skills. In Years 10 and 11, college courses, work experience and wide-ranging opportunities for accreditation successfully concentrate pupils' attention on preparing for their lives beyond school. Pupils' particular talents, for instance, in the performing arts, are cultivated and courses organised to encourage them. An excellent personal, social and health education programme enables pupils to gain an outstanding awareness of how to keep fit and safe. The impressive array of enrichment activities is a significant strength of the school. Residential stays, visits to theatres and museums, and participation in sporting tournaments are all linked to courses of study. They are a source of tremendous enjoyment and motivation for pupils of all ages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The procedures to safeguard pupils are comprehensive and effective. Pupils facing social or emotional difficulties are identified quickly. The school enlists the help of a very wide range of agencies to enhance its response and enable pupils to make the most of their education. The behaviour manager takes the lead in establishing programmes to support pupils who need help to meet the school's very high expectations. However, the onus is firmly on teaching staff to play their part to the full. Weekly briefings allow staff to share concerns and ensure that all are aware of pupils' problems and the approaches to be used with them. Because this work is so successful, teachers are able to focus their efforts in lessons on helping pupils to learn rather than controlling their behaviour. Academic guidance is good. There is an ever-increasing emphasis on pupils taking responsibility for their own learning, for example, by assessing their own progress. The Connexions adviser is fully involved in the outstanding arrangements for preparing pupils for leaving school. Parents are full of praise for the ease with which they can approach the school and the support they receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team provides the headteacher with very strong support. This has enabled a variety of developments to take place, for example, within the curriculum. Staff with subject responsibilities do not play a big enough part in monitoring and improving pupils' performance and the quality of teaching in their subjects. There are good systems to enable senior staff to build up an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas where improvement is needed. Perceived weaknesses are followed up carefully. For instance, concerns about inconsistencies in assessments of pupils' learning were shared with staff and agreement reached. As a result, progress can be tracked more accurately. Governance is good. Governors are highly committed to the school and fulfil their duties well, for example, by ensuring that the budget is spent wisely. Partnerships with the community, schools and colleges and parents are exceptional. They have a very positive impact on pupils' achievement and personal development.

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?	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?	1
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?	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	1
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?	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

9 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Nethergate School, Clifton, Nottingham, NG11 8HX

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

It is a good school and some things about it are outstanding, including your own personal development. We were so impressed by your excellent behaviour and your enthusiasm for learning and having fun. We can understand why you enjoy school so much, because you have so many exciting things to do. The school cares for you exceptionally well, which is why you feel so safe and happy. You do an enormous amount to help each other, the staff and the local community. Well done! Staff at Nethergate are extremely good at helping you to get ready to move on to work or college. You become very mature and confident young men and women, each of you are a credit to your school.

You learn a lot, because you have good teachers. The oldest pupils get lots of awards and certificates to show how much progress they have made. We were interested to see that the teachers set targets for you to reach during each lesson. We have asked the school to make sure that you meet these targets as often as possible.

Your school is led and managed well. We noticed that your headteacher looks very carefully at the progress you all make. We would like the teachers to join in with this work, so they can help to find ways to make your school even better.

We want to send our very best wishes to each one of you.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector