

Calthorpe School Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103604
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323865
Inspection date	14 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Megee

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	289
Sixth form	68
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	29
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kyra Butwell
Headteacher	Graham Hardy
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Darwin Street Highgate Birmingham B12 0TJ
Telephone number	01217 734637
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

the achievement of pupils, especially whether any group of pupils achieves less well than others

the effectiveness of the school's actions to promote good attendance

how well the school measures its own effectiveness.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, analysis of the school's tracking and assessment data, and discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, parents, students, governors and representatives of the various organisations with whom the school has formal partnerships.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Calthorpe School provides education for pupils with severe, complex and profound learning difficulties from across the city of Birmingham. A quarter of the pupils have autistic spectrum disorders and several students have challenging behaviours. Many pupils have additional sensory difficulties such as hearing or visual impairment. English is an additional language for two thirds of the pupils. All students have a statement of special educational needs and 18 students are looked after by the local authority.

The school holds specialist status in three areas: sports, mathematics and computing, and modern foreign languages. The school has a satellite unit based at a local mainstream school.

In the past few years, the school has achieved or received re-designation in a great number of awards, including the Charter Mark for Excellence, Investors in People, Basic Skills Quality Marks – both Primary and Secondary – and the Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Calthorpe School is an outstanding, trail-blazing school which provides an enormous range of excellent educational opportunities for its pupils that successfully promote very high personal and academic achievement. The school has excellent partnerships with local schools and organisations which it uses highly effectively in the interests of the pupils, and enjoys a very high local and national reputation which is justly deserved. The school's continuing high performance since the last inspection, along with the exceptionally high calibre of its leadership team, means that it has an outstanding capacity to improve even further.

The cornerstone of the school's success is the way in which the headteacher and the senior staff relentlessly pursue excellence and innovation, leaving no stone unturned if there is a chance to benefit the pupils. The leadership team's drive and enthusiasm in turn infect the whole staff, who actively seek out ways on their own account to improve provision and practice. Relationships all around the school are extremely positive, and as a result, pupils love coming to school and quickly become confident learners. As one parent wrote, 'My daughter started in June and she has already gained more confidence and her communication has really improved.' The school keeps a keen eye on its results and data, so that staff can respond immediately if there are concerns from home or if any child is felt to be doing less well than predicted.

It is little wonder then that pupils' academic achievement and personal development, from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through to post-16 are excellent, and no pupil or group of pupils is left behind. Standards remain low because of the nature of pupils' difficulties, but their achievement is excellent both against individual targets and in the increasingly broad range of relevant and challenging opportunities on offer in which pupils can demonstrate their skills and understanding. Pupils are very thoroughly prepared to meet the challenges of their accredited programmes in Key Stage 4 and at post-16. Pupils with severe learning difficulties are achieving creditable grades in Entry Level GCSEs, and those working alongside mainstream pupils have on occasion achieved higher results than their peers. Pupils leave the school extremely well prepared for the next stage of their lives. As one parent wrote, 'My son has thrived here and we never thought that he would.'

Excellent teaching can be seen from the EYFS right through to post-16, and classrooms and corridors are full of bright displays highlighting pupils' own achievements and endeavours. All teachers plan their lessons extremely well, manage difficult behaviour sensitively but effectively, and make very good use of assessment. In a few cases, however, signing and symbols are not always used effectively to assist pupils' understanding.

The school makes extensive use of its unusually high number of specialisms to provide a uniquely rich, outstanding and innovative curriculum which closely matches the interests and aptitudes of the pupils, and which promotes very high achievement. Much of the curriculum is seen to be validated through the raft of specialist awards the school receives, such as Quality and Charter Marks.

The school's sports specialism has resulted in the pupils as well as the local community having access to excellent new facilities such as the state-of-the-art fitness suite and dance and drama studios. The specialism has led to the appointment of a number of skilful specialist teachers and pupils are able to participate in swimming galas, lunchtime basketball sessions and highly individualised fitness training, through which they gain an excellent awareness of how to be safe and healthy.

The mathematics and computing specialism has resulted in a similar updating of resources and specialist teaching, including enhanced access to multisensory facilities and videoconferencing with other schools. The modern foreign languages specialism provides wonderful opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge of other languages and cultures, particularly through the contact and residential visits with their partner schools in France, China and South Africa. These visits, as well as the current focus on creativity in the curriculum, give the pupils the chance to step into the shoes of others and to gain another perspective on the world.

Pupils develop a very real understanding of the community in which they live through first-class opportunities to learn alongside pupils in mainstream schools and colleges, and to participate in community activities. The school employs a team of inclusion mentors who very effectively assist pupils to be fully included within the chosen mainstream settings. The school keeps a database which tracks all pupils' participation in such inclusive activities and ensures that no pupil misses out. As a consequence of all these and other initiatives, pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural awareness and understanding are extremely well developed.

Pupils at every stage of learning receive excellent support, care and guidance. The school nurtures its strong relationship with parents, many of whom report on the 'wonderful welcome' their pupils are given. Parents greatly value the way they are consulted and included, and make comments such as 'staff are always ready to help', or 'Someone takes the time to answer us – they take serious note of our questions and comments.' The kind but firm approach to behaviour management as well as the exciting range of activities mean that behaviour is excellent, even for those few pupils who may become unpredictably upset. Pupils who have serious medical difficulties are given on-the-spot expert support from the multi-agency team on site. The school works hard to achieve good attendance, although a very small number of parents continue to take their children out of school for extended holidays against the school's wishes. Classroom staff give pupils plenty of realistic feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do next in order to improve. They do this verbally or through writing, signs or symbols as well as through a wide range of awards for individual academic or personal achievement.

The school leaders at all levels are ambitious and dedicated to ensuring that pupils achieve the highest possible standards in their work and in their personal development. They successfully foster a culture among the staff which is self-critical, reflective and innovative. The headteacher articulates a very clear vision of where the school is going and all staff are solidly behind all the initiatives. The school's practice is rooted in open, frank and accurate self-evaluation. There is a hunger among the staff to update their own skills and to undertake training where necessary to do even better for the children. The school places a very high priority on the staff it has appointed, developing them and deploying them to their own strengths. The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well. As well as its international links, the school contributes hugely to the well-being of its immediate community by offering liberal use of its expertise and facilities. The school provides outreach support to mainstream partners with the teaching of French, Spanish and Mandarin; local people with chronic disabilities benefit greatly from hydrotherapy sessions; those who speak English as an additional language come in for English lessons or to use the computer suite; families from across the city gratefully attend the holiday provision for children with complex needs. The governors, many of whom are key educational professionals, very skilfully provide an exacting challenge as well as an insightful critical friendship to the leadership team.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The senior staff for post-16 are very skilful and enthusiastic, and are determined to provide all the students with every opportunity to attain their full potential. Their success in doing this means that students achieve outstandingly well in an increasing range of accredited programmes which include Accreditation for Life and Living, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Certificate in Life Skills and GCSE Entry Level in physical education, mathematics, science, English and food technology. These programmes provide the core of an excellent curriculum which is enriched further by the current focus on developing creativity. The school makes excellent use of specialist teachers in music, art, dance and drama to enhance students' enjoyment of learning and their cultural development. The staff do very well in promoting students' personal development further by offering them many opportunities to be of service to others. Older students are seen taking younger pupils out to the buses and looking after them at break times. The school has a very good working relationship with the Connexions service to ensure that students move smoothly on to the next important stage of their lives.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The leadership of the EYFS is very strong and as a result, all aspects of the provision are outstandingly good. Children make excellent progress right from the start, especially in their ability to communicate and interact with staff and with each other. EYFS staff go out of their way to establish very quickly a strong bond with each family so that there is a climate of consistent mutual trust and confidence. As one parent said, 'They have really given us hope.' This partnership is a key element in ensuring that both home and school are working along the same lines to support each individual child. Assessment practices are very robust and ensure that the next steps in learning are accurately identified. Teaching is very skilful and there is very good planning for individual needs. Classroom staff work very well together as a team, and there is obvious harmony throughout lessons as children smile and make positive vocal responses to the staff and each other.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that staff always make effective use of signs and symbols whenever they are required.

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	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?	1	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	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1	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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Calthorpe School Sports College, Birmingham, B12 0TJ

Thank you for meeting us recently when we came to inspect your school.

These are some of the things I found out about the school.

- It gives you a fantastically good education.
- The staff help you enormously whenever you need it, and you make fabulous progress both as you grow up and in your school work.
- Your teachers are very skilful.
- You have a wonderful range of things to do.
- Staff give you excellent personal support and advice about your studies, and you appreciate all they do.
- Those in charge lead the school very well indeed.

I have asked your teachers to do just one thing to improve the quality of the school even further.

- Make sure that they always give you the signs and symbols that you need to understand what is being said.

I hope you will help the school to get even better in whatever way you can. Perhaps some of you could remember to give the teachers a sign or point to a symbol so they know exactly what you mean.

Very good wishes for the future.

Mick Megee Lead inspector