

Nancealverne School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112087
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	325524
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Mick 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)	79
Sixth form	17
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Gregory
Headteacher	Fiona Cock
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Madron Road Penzance TR20 8TP
Telephone number	01736 365039
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Nancealverne School provides education for pupils in West Cornwall who have severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, or autism. The school has a very small number of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Nancealverne is a happy school where academic achievement is good and personal development is outstanding. Parents appreciate the close understanding and relationship between home and school. One comment, typical of those received, was, 'The school and all the staff are very special to every parent and child, who have the privilege of knowing them.' The headteacher and other senior staff have successfully built up a self-critical community of caring professionals who leave no stone unturned if it is to the benefit of the pupils. Good leadership and management, together with accurate self-evaluation, are the key to the school's success. The school's track record in continual improvement means that it has good capacity to improve in the future.

The small number of pupils in each class means that staff know the pupils very well, and can give them on-the-spot excellent care, guidance and support. Staff constantly encourage pupils, letting them know if they have done well and what they need to improve further. This gives the pupils reassurance and confidence, and coupled with good teaching and assessment, this leads to good progress in almost all subjects for pupils of all ages.

Within this generally good picture, there are a few areas of inconsistency that hamper achievement. There is no easily accessible outdoor play area for the very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and this limits their opportunities for outdoors experience and learning. Throughout the school, most teachers match activities well to meet the quite wide range of needs in each class. However, one or two teachers are not so effective in this, and this slows down progress for some of the pupils within their classes. The leadership team last year identified that there was a need to further improve pupils' communication skills. As a result of this focus, staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage and lower school now make good use of signs, pictures and symbols to assist the understanding of pupils with communication difficulties. Staff in the upper school and in post-16 are not so effective in developing communication skills and sometimes miss opportunities to give these additional cues. This makes it difficult for some pupils to grasp the teacher's meaning and hampers their progress.

Pupils love coming to school not only because of the tremendously warm reception they receive from staff. There is also a wealth of exciting things to do. The outstanding curriculum supports pupils' personal development very well, especially through the imaginative personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. The school offers excellent opportunities to learn in mainstream schools and an extensive range of enrichment activities, such as gardening, football, computer and craft lunchtime clubs. The pupils speak highly of the residential experiences, and there are regular and frequent opportunities for pupils to contribute to their own and the local community. The leadership team has been very effective in fostering and maintaining excellent links with other agencies and schools, including those in other countries, to the benefit of the pupils.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The curriculum at post-16 offers the students good opportunities to develop the basic skills that they will need in later life. The school allows each student to choose from a number of different and interesting curriculum options, so that timetables are well tailored to match individual interests and aspirations. As a result, students are well motivated and achieve good

results in the accredited programmes they undertake in relation to their starting points. The school is planning to offer pupils an even wider range of programmes in the future, in order to increase further the range of choices available, particularly for the more able students.

Restrictions in the accommodation mean that there is insufficient space this year for all Year 12 students to be taught together within their designated area, and some students have had to remain in a class alongside pupils in Years 10 and 11. Although this is undesirable, the school has made the best of the situation, by making arrangements for the students to have frequent, regular access to and contact with the post-16 programme and students.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage establish a strong partnership with parents right from the very start. Before a child joins the school, the staff gather detailed information about each child from the parents, as well as from speech therapists, physiotherapists and the local pre-school assessment centre that every child attends. School and home have daily contact and an exchange of useful information through home-school books. Standards are much lower than usually seen at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, because of skilful specialist teaching based on very good information, the very small number of children in the class make at least good progress in all areas of learning, and their personal development is outstanding. The very small numbers mean that the staff are able to provide one-to-one support for much of the time. The high standard of individualised care, support and guidance means that children feel secure, gain in confidence and make very rapid progress in their personal development. They cooperate well with each other, happily sharing games and books, and behaviour is excellent. The curriculum provides the pupils with a good mix of teacher-led and independent activities. There is a big emphasis on the rapid development of communication, and there is very good use of picture exchanges to assist interactions and to help pupils to make and indicate their choices. However, the accommodation does not afford the staff and pupils easy access to the outside. Although staff do their best to offer as many outdoor experiences as possible, the limited access restricts their opportunities for achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all staff make the most effective use of signs, symbols and objects of reference to aid pupils' understanding and promote communication.
- Ensure that all staff consistently match the activities in lessons to the various needs of all the learners.
- Improve the provision for outdoor play in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are exceptionally low when compared with national averages because the pupils have severe, profound or complex learning difficulties. Nevertheless, right through the school, from the Early Years Foundation Stage to post-16, pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and science. Pupils achieve well against their individual targets, which are specific, challenging and reviewed every half term. Students at in Year 11 and at post-16 gain good results in their accredited programmes. There is little discernible difference within the school in the achievement of the different groups, such as boys and girls. As a result of some good staff development, pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the lower school make very good progress

in developing their skills in communicating. However, in the secondary department and at post-16, staff do not always remember to use these cues to make their meaning clear, and this checks the progress of some pupils in those departments. Most teachers ensure that lesson activities are well matched to the different needs and capabilities of pupils. However, achievement is held back for some pupils where the teachers are not so skilful in doing this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really love coming to school, and this is clearly seen in their exemplary behaviour and their good attendance. When pupils are absent, it is almost always for sickness or hospital visits, and is unavoidable, especially for those pupils with complex medical needs. Despite this, some pupils struggle in even when they are unwell. As one parent commented, 'My son loves it so much at school he won't tell me when he's poorly.' Pupils are always engaged with their learning, and fully enjoy the activities. There is excellent social development throughout the school. Pupils form strong friendships with other pupils and adults in their class. They show great consideration and kindness to each other and to the staff, helping out without needing to be prompted. Pupils say in meetings and through questionnaires how exceptionally safe they feel. They develop an excellent understanding of a healthy lifestyle, as they eat healthily, drink plenty of water and undertake regular exercise because of the constant encouragement they receive. Pupils have opportunities to reflect on their own lives and those of others through the regular assemblies, and in PSHE lessons. Pupils develop an excellent awareness of their own and others' cultures and faiths through an excellent programme of educational visits and through regular visits of faith leaders such as the local rabbi. They contribute outstandingly well to their own community, for example by serving on the school council. Out in the local community, pupils are well known for their charitable work, for example in the town's Oxfam shop. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their lives by their good acquisition of basic skills, their increasing capacity for teamwork and, from Year 10 onwards, their good progress in learning related to the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Classroom staff work very well together to ensure that pupils' personal needs are always well met. The small numbers in each class mean that staff get to know pupils very well and are able to take action swiftly if pupils become upset or feel uncomfortable. This means that pupils become confident and happy learners. Most teachers plan activities that match up well with the wide range of needs within the class, although one or two teachers are less skilful at this. As a result, some pupils become bored because they find the work too easy, while others find it too difficult and become disheartened. Teachers have generally good knowledge of the subjects they teach, and make good use of new technology, such as interactive whiteboards to enliven lessons. Classroom staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage and junior department have good understanding and skills in using signs, symbols and objects of reference to assist pupils. In the senior school and at post-16, staff are not yet so effective at this. The school has recognised this and plans for this to be a focus for this coming year.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an excellent range of activities, and this is a key reason why pupils like coming to school so much. One parent's response, typical of all those received, said, 'The school gives you everything you would get at mainstream school and much more. You get swimming, pottery, the sensory room, country dancing and drama. It all comes as part of a wonderful package.'

The creative curriculum is very prominent within the school, and there are very beautiful displays of pupils' work everywhere. Much of the work is of very high quality. One parent said, 'My other child is at a mainstream secondary school, and you really can't tell the difference in the quality of the pottery and art work.' The PSHE curriculum strongly supports the pupils' personal development and has innovative elements such as the separate boys' and girls' groups, which allow the staff to focus on the different needs of each gender. The school offers an extensive range of activities that enhance the curriculum further, such as after-school clubs in judo and drama. Parents particularly appreciate the holiday activities provided, with adventure days in sailing, mountain biking, windsurfing and kayaking. The school's excellent links with local mainstream schools mean that over half the pupils are able to attend lessons in those schools. These experiences strongly support pupils' social development. Accommodation deficiencies in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at post-16 make the curriculum in those departments good rather than outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has very robust procedures to safeguard pupils, which meet all the government requirements. Pastoral care is excellent. Pupils say that they always have someone to turn to if they are in trouble, and parents say that all staff, including administrators and premises staff, go out of their way to provide reassurance and guidance to pupils as well as their families. The school makes parents feel that they are all part of 'one big family'. One parent told how staff had made the long trip to her house to deliver the Christmas card that her ill son had made for her when he was at school. Another parent told how she received offers of help from staff in the holiday time. The school ensures that there is 'wrap-around' support for families from the various agencies, and fills any important gaps out of its own resources. For example, the health authority has been unable to provide the school with a speech therapist for a considerable time. This is a cause of great concern for both staff and parents. The school has appointed a communication specialist out of its own budget to fill this gap and provide much-needed guidance and support. Because of this initiative, pupils and staff are now able to make very effective use of aids such as communication passports and picture exchanges. Pupils receive constant, excellent feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve further. The staff make every effort to ensure that pupils and parents are fully involved with the setting and reviewing of individual targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is very committed to doing the very best for the pupils, and all members of staff at every level share her aspiration for pupils to enjoy their learning and to achieve their potential. There are very good systems in place for tracking pupils' progress, and for monitoring

the performance of teachers. These systems for self-evaluation give the senior staff and governors constantly updated and accurate information about the school's strengths and weaknesses. The senior staff and governors make effective use of this information for planning for the future, and for ensuring that staff development activities are relevant to the school's priorities. The school is well managed and parents say that they are given plenty of notice about school events and important meetings. The governors provide the school with good, constructive criticism and challenge. The school promotes community cohesion well through its excellent local, national and international links. Groups from the school have assisted the local authority with an audit of disabled access all around Penzance, and this has led to much improved local facilities. The school's partnership with a school in Germany has led to a sharing of curriculum information to the benefit of both schools. The leadership team has not yet been effective in ensuring that there is a consistent approach to differentiation and communication support throughout the school. Nevertheless it has been successful overall in bringing about good achievement and outstanding personal development.

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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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2	
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?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2	2

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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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?	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

27 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Nancealverne School, Madron Road, Penzance TR20 8TP

You may remember that we came to your school recently to see how you were all getting on. Thank you very much for helping us with our job. A special thanks to those of you in the school council who came to tell us what you feel about the school and how much you enjoy being there.

This is what we found out.

- You make good progress in your work because of the great help you get from the staff.
- You are growing up very well indeed, and your behaviour is first class.
- Your teachers and support staff do a good job of teaching you.
- You love all the exciting things that the school gives you to do.
- All the staff care very much about you, and nearly always give you the right help exactly when you need it.
- Those who run the school do a good job in leading the staff and making sure everything runs smoothly.

To make things even better, I have asked the school to do three things.

- Make sure that the staff help you understand better by using signs and symbols as much as possible.
- Make sure that all teachers match up what they give you to do in lessons with what each of you needs.
- Make sure that the youngest children can easily play and work outdoors.
- Do you think you could help the school do these things, maybe by using signs and symbols yourselves just as a reminder

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mick Megee Lead inspector