

Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121257
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	327437
Inspection date	25 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	78
Sixth form	20
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	Mrs Helene Almey
Headteacher	Mrs Jan Wiggins
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St Faith's Road Old Catton Norwich NR6 7AD
Telephone number	01603 466467
Fax number	01603 466407

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

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

- whether pupils' progress had accelerated as a result of actions taken since the last inspection
- how effectively the school develops pupils' awareness and appreciation of a variety of cultures other than their own
- the impact of the school's specialist status, particularly the work of the communication team, and how the school evaluates this aspect.

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

Description of the school

Hall School is a special school that provides for boys and girls with a range of significant and complex learning difficulties. Pupils come to school from a wide area including urban Norwich and rural surroundings. Although the school can admit children into the Early Years Foundation Stage, there have been no children of this age on the school's roll for the last two years. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are also taught in the early years provision. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is well below average. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Most are from White British backgrounds and a few are in the care of the local authority. The proportion eligible for free school meals is well above average. The school is subject to reorganisation as part of the implementation of Norfolk's Special Educational Needs strategy. In September 2008, the school was awarded specialist schools status for its work in 'Communication and Interaction'. As part of this, it provides outreach support to other schools. Its work has also been recognised by Activemark, Sportsmark and Excellence in Work Related Learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hall School is a good school. It is well led, managed and governed, and has an effective staff team. The headteacher provides strong, energetic leadership and her positive influence on the school is recognised by many. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school and find it hard to identify ways in which it could improve. Almost all parents are delighted with the provision it makes for their children, and report pupils 'coming on in leaps and bounds', staff that are 'very caring' and 'good communication between staff and parents'. One noted that, 'There is always a warm welcome when I visit school.'

There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in teaching and learning, which is good. This has helped to accelerate pupils' progress, which is also now good. Whether children enter the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage or later, their attainments are well below average. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Although standards remain well below average because of the nature and extent of pupils' learning difficulties, all groups of pupils achieve well. There have been two key improvements in teaching and learning. Staff plan more effectively for the range of pupils in each class. Good quality individual education plans have clear personal targets in the key areas of communication, literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), and personal and social education. The school is ambitious on behalf of its pupils and sets targets that are challenging. Individual and subject targets are taken into account when planning lessons and pupils have opportunities to work towards their targets and are regularly reminded of them. They achieve 80% of their targets within the timescale specified. Since the last inspection, the school has developed the skills of teaching assistants well; they now support learning effectively. They also take on whole-school responsibilities, within the school's communication team, for instance.

A robust system has been introduced for tracking pupils' progress, and this is also used to see how the school's performance compares with similar pupils nationally. This information is used effectively to see where strengths and weaknesses lie and to target support where it is needed most. Tracking information shows clearly the effectiveness of the work of the school's communication team, as intervention by them clearly accelerates progress in those classes where they have been involved. It has also demonstrated that pupils do not progress as rapidly in ICT as they do in other areas of the curriculum. This is associated with some lack of staff skills in using new technology as well as a need to ensure that ICT skills are taught in all subjects, just as communication skills are.

Skills in communication are taught well. There is a detailed scheme of work, developed in conjunction with a speech and language therapist, and good individual and small group support is provided by members of the communication team.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are all encouraged well by the school's rich and enjoyable curriculum. There is a good range of opportunities for pupils to learn about the cultures and customs of others, and all members of the school community get on very well together. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. Effective planning and support for those who have behaviour difficulties enables them to develop more socially appropriate behaviour. Behaviour is good. Pupils say that they feel safe in school, they enjoy their lessons and they particularly like their friends. As a result, most attend well, although unavoidable absence for medical reasons brings the overall figure down. Staff work hard to assure pupils' well-being and parents are confident that their children

are well cared for. The progress of all vulnerable pupils is carefully checked and the school works particularly well with other professionals to ensure that all have the support they need.

Some considerable improvements to the environment and accommodation have been secured since the last inspection, including splendid playground facilities with specially adapted equipment for pupils with disabilities so that all can enjoy physical exercise. The school council participated in planning for this, by suggesting a shady area for instance. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and the kitchen caters for individual dietary needs. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider communities by raising funds for charities at home and abroad, recycling, and representing the school in local sporting competitions. Most pupils move on to become students in the school's post-16 provision where they develop well their basic skills, awareness of the adult world, including the world of work, and their independence skills. They leave well prepared for the next steps in their lives.

Despite some recent improvements, the accommodation is not well suited to those of secondary age and above. There are few subject specialist areas, for instance, so the experiences that can be provided are somewhat limited. Staff have to work hard to ensure that toilet facilities do not compromise pupils' privacy and dignity. Because the car park is cramped, close supervision is necessary to ensure that arrivals and departures are safe, so the independence of some pupils and students is not maximised. The school has suitable plans to secure further improvements, and some of these are underway. A sensory room is about to be replaced with a therapy area containing new, more interactive technology, better suited to those with complex needs, including visual impairment.

The school's specialist status reflects a shared and ambitious vision for the school to become a centre of excellence. Although at an early stage, the school has suitable plans to evaluate the impact of its specialist role, including outreach provided for mainstream schools. It has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school strives to provide a more adult environment for students over 16. However, the extent to which this is possible is limited. One group of students has separate accommodation whilst others are taught in a classroom in the main school. Students have no common room, and the space and facilities available for encouraging independence skills on the school's site are limited. However, the school makes good use of the local community. Links with a local secondary school provide access to a sports hall, for instance. The curriculum provided is good as it is well matched to the ages, abilities and individual needs of students. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging communication, social and independent skills, including a course in independent travelling. Greater responsibility is effectively encouraged and students enjoy tending their garden, entertaining visitors during lunches and taking part in a conservation project in the adjacent park. There are good opportunities for them to learn about the world of work, experience the workplace and sample college courses, as well as to acquire enterprise skills. Teaching is good and so students make good progress and achieve externally recognised accreditation. Good arrangements support them in making the transition to adult life and they are well prepared for the next step. Many continue their education on leaving school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good leadership is provided by an assistant headteacher, who is a member of the special schools' working party that assesses teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage across the county special schools. This ensures that the quality of provision is good. As a result, the school is well prepared to admit children should they be referred. Children benefit socially from learning alongside older pupils in the early years setting. The school maintains a high standard of appropriate facilities, equipment and resources. The early years area provides a safe and secure environment for children and includes a well equipped outdoor area, used effectively to encourage learning. Children's needs are assessed in detail on admission. There is an ongoing open dialogue with parents. A robust curriculum, based on the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, is well adapted to meet individual needs. There are good systems in place to assess children on arrival, identify personal learning targets for them and check on their progress. Although the school has not formally evaluated provision against the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage, these are met. There was insufficient evidence for inspectors to evaluate the personal development and achievements of children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the teaching of ICT across the curriculum by developing staff skills in using new technology and ensuring that it is used to support learning in all subjects.
- Improve the accommodation, particularly for students over 16, to address the weaknesses identified in this report.

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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 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?	IE ²	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	IE ²	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
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	

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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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 eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 February 2009

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Hall School, Norwich, NR6 7AD

Thank you for making us welcome in your school. I enjoyed talking to the group who met with me at lunchtime. We came to the school to see how well you are getting on. We wanted to find out what is good and what could be improved.

We agree with you and your parents that your school is a good one. You are all doing well in your lessons and reaching your targets. I am pleased that you enjoy school life and feel safe there. The staff take good care of you. If you need extra help from other people they arrange this for you. You all behave responsibly and get on well with each other and the staff. You help others well by raising money for charities and recycling. The new playground equipment means that all can enjoy exercise at playtime. Those of you that are learning to travel independently and safely in the local area will find this useful when you leave school.

The staff are already doing many things to make the school better for you. There are two important things they are going to do next. The staff are going to make sure they use new technology more often to help you learn and use your ICT skills in all lessons. They are also going to improve the building and the arrangements for transport when you arrive and leave the school.

We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead inspector