

Cleaswell Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122382
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327712
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Barry Lyden
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Burdis
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2006
School address	School Avenue Guide Post Choppington Northumberland NE62 5DJ
Telephone number	01670 823182
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Age group	5–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Traditionally, most pupils exhibited moderate learning difficulties but in recent years many pupils have been admitted with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. A small number of pupils, mainly in Key Stage 1 or 2, have more severe or complex difficulties. Occasionally, children under the age of five are admitted but there are currently no children of this age. Nearly all pupils are of White British origin and speak English as their main language. Most, but not all, come from families experiencing greater than average levels of social and economic disadvantage.

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 enjoys the overwhelming support of parents, many of whom expressed their gratitude for the ways in which the school is helping their children to achieve the ultimate goal of securing a much better future than had seemed possible at the time of their admission. Every parent who responded to a questionnaire reported that their child enjoyed school and every pupil the inspector spoke to agreed. Inspection evidence shows that personal development is good and this is a happy school for pupils and staff alike. This can be seen in the excellent relationships between staff and pupils, which contributes enormously to good teaching and learning and the good care, guidance and support offered to pupils. Pupils play a big part in generating a feeling of well-being by behaving well and showing a good awareness of how this, and their consideration for others, contributes to keeping the school a safe place. Added to this, the many ways in which pupils' actions improve the lives of local people, often the elderly or vulnerable, points to their contribution to the school and local communities being outstanding.

While the nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that standards are well below average, nearly all pupils make good progress and achieve well in relation to their personal targets. Teachers' high expectations ensure that these targets are usually suitably challenging but there are instances when the marking of pupils' work misses opportunities to contribute more to the academic guidance they are given and to the adjustment of targets to ensure that all pupils remain fully challenged in all lessons.

Teaching is good overall. Some of it is undertaken by higher level teaching assistants who are providing effective teaching. The school's records show that teaching is occasionally inspirational but that some is satisfactory. The evidence of inspection broadly supports this view. A strength in many lessons is the variety of approaches to teaching that contribute to pupils' enthusiasm for learning.

The curriculum is good. It goes beyond statutory requirements although the length of the school day for older pupils is slightly short. The physical and emotional care of pupils is good. Formal procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good.

The school is well led and managed, with all staff contributing to the raising of standards and identifying opportunities for further improvement. However, the reviewing and updating of school policies, such as those for marking and behaviour management, are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure staff are prepared to deal with the changing needs of the intake. The premises are very well maintained and administration is efficient. This is a better school than when it was last inspected and has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve procedures for marking pupils' work to ensure that teachers' comments provide clearer guidance to pupils about how they can improve their work.
- Ensure school policies are systematically reviewed and revised so that they match the needs of the changing pupil population.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that they do not reach the standards set for pupils in mainstream schools. Instead, progress is appropriately measured

against personal targets following reviews involving pupils and parents, taking full account of the views of other agencies and professionals involved in each pupil's education and the promotion of their well-being. The individual targets set ensure that pupils have to work hard to achieve them and about 80% are fully met. This is a good result and reflects good achievement.

Attainment on entry varies enormously. On arrival, many pupils are at a stage where their social and academic skills are far below those expected of their age. By the time they leave, each pupil has achieved well. The highest attainers gain Entry Level qualifications in English, mathematics and science. The achievement of lower attaining pupils is more often recognised in the gaining of qualifications, such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) bronze award. Increasing numbers of pupils are demonstrating their practical and artistic skills by gaining passes at GCSE at the lower levels in design and technology and in art.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is their personal well-being. 'May we live, work and play together in peace and kindness' is the wording of the school prayer, which also serves as a statement of the school's intent. It was composed by Year 9 pupils several years ago. Pupils live up to its message.

Cultural development is particularly good, with pupils having many opportunities to learn about their own heritage and the lives of people from backgrounds different to their own. Pupils demonstrate their growing understanding of society's moral and social expectations by behaving well, being friendly and by showing consideration for other pupils who are facing difficulties. These qualities also demonstrate the ways in which pupils develop a good understanding of how their actions can affect the life and safety of others. Pupils enjoy coming to school; attendance is slightly below average but absence is usually for legitimate reasons such as medical appointments. Pupils show considerable enthusiasm when participating in lunchtime clubs and involve themselves well in the many other activities and events organised by the school. Participation in a good range of sporting and physical activities is wholehearted and, when coupled with sensible eating and drinking choices, this shows pupils' good awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Pupils contribute enormously to bettering the school and also the lives of many people in the local community. Senior citizens from the village are invited to share lunchtimes with pupils and pupils play an important part in organising and hosting events alongside others from local schools.

Older pupils become increasingly independent, learning how to use public transport and phone boxes. They also learn how to look after their money and keep themselves safe. On leaving school, the vast majority choose to continue with education or training which shows their education has prepared them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils are a very positive feature, which contributes enormously to the good behaviour seen in class and

the enthusiasm pupils show for learning. Staff understand pupils' learning needs well and they demonstrate good ways of meeting them with practical activities that lead to effective learning. Most teachers make it clear to pupils what they are expected to learn in lessons. However, there are occasions when the focus is rather more on what they are going to teach instead of on what pupils are expected to learn. Teachers involve pupils well in discussions about their work and how it could be improved but there is too much variation in the marking of pupils' work and in the recording of the advice pupils are given. Classroom assistants are invariably well-briefed which puts them in a good position to support pupils. Excellent examples exist of how all teachers could help pupils to learn more effectively by being more careful in their assessment of pupils' work in lessons but this best practice is not always shared.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It fully reflects national guidelines and has been recently developed to reflect the changing needs of pupils arriving at the school. Activities are well tailored to meet the needs of all pupils. There have been good developments in planning the curriculum for younger pupils with more severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of these pupils is growing and, in recognition of this, the school has placed a good focus on providing more sensory experiences and placing a strong focus on promoting their ability to communicate. The curriculum for older pupils has similarly been improved to provide good opportunities for Key Stage 4 pupils to develop the academic and work-based skills they will need in the future. A wide range of appropriate accreditation is available and this is well supplemented by good opportunities for these pupils to experience life in the workplace and develop important independent learning skills. Particularly good transition arrangements at the end of Year 11 allow pupils to register at a local high school to continue their sixth form education in the familiar surroundings of their present school. Across the school, there is a good range of enrichment activities that include visits abroad, most recently a skiing trip to Norway, and daily activity clubs. Many activities are undertaken as part of the school's excellent links with the wider community, such as the lunch club for older members of the local community and joint sports activities with other schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good quality care, guidance and support. The pastoral care of pupils is particularly good and formal arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress are developing. Staff are ever vigilant and perceptive when pupils appear to be facing difficulties and, through exceptionally close working with other agencies and professionals, extra help is quickly directed towards those who are not making the progress expected of them. The school ensures that pupils are very well safeguarded and cared for and that potential risks are always taken into account before pupils participate in activities. All current safeguarding requirements are met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. Governance, in particular, has greatly improved since the last inspection, with governors taking a much greater part in the process of bringing about improvement and challenging management decisions. The headteacher leads

the school well. In combination with the good and conscientious work of all staff who have management responsibilities, he has contributed significantly to the maintenance of a happy school ethos, much admired by parents and appreciated by staff and pupils alike.

Positioning the school at the centre of the community has been a priority. Many pupils do not live in the locality but excellent links have been developed with many other schools, most notably with two other schools that share the same campus, and the high school to which pupils register on leaving Cleaswell Hill. The school hosts many events which benefit the community, is keen to share its facilities with other organisations and works very effectively to share its expertise with others. It reaches beyond the locality by helping pupils to feel involved in the lives of others as far afield as Africa and Brazil for example, during the inspection the school was hosting a visit from four Norwegian educationalists. As a result, community cohesion is good.

The review and revision of school policies, such as those for marking and behaviour management are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure they respond to the changing needs of the pupils. Nonetheless, leaders and managers understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well. A very good programme of continuing professional development extends to all staff. It is closely linked to areas for improvement identified in the school improvement plan. Teaching is regularly and perceptively monitored, with the result that little that was unveiled by inspectors came as a surprise.

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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
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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/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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 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
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 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cleaswell Hill School, Northumberland, NE62 5DJ

It was a real pleasure to inspect your school the other day. Thanks to all of you for making my visit so enjoyable and a special thanks to those of you who gave up a bit of your time to talk to me.

I visit lots of schools like yours. It is my job to have a good look round to see what is going on and then to congratulate the school on what is going well and suggest where I think improvements could be made. Here is what I thought.

You go to a good, well-managed school. You told me so and so did your parents. Nothing I saw during the two days I spent with you suggested otherwise. It was obvious that you like your school and all the good activities that you so enthusiastically join in with. You are making good progress because you are well taught, you behave well and you are keen to learn. You are well looked after and feel happy and safe in school.

A couple of things could make your school even better. When I looked through your books I noticed that some of your work could have been marked a bit more helpfully. You obviously take a lot of care with your work and I have asked the school to ensure that teachers make more notes in your books to help you to understand what you were doing well and where you could try to make improvements. I have also asked that some important school documents which help to ensure that all staff know what is expected of them in every situation are brought up-to-date.

Thank you again for making me so welcome. Keep working hard and enjoying yourselves!

All the best

Yours faithfully

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector