

The Grove Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122385
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327715
Inspection date	7 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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)	37
Sixth form	4
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	Mr Laurence J Pearson
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Brown
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Grove Gardens Tweedmouth Berwick-upon-Tweed Northumberland TD15 2EN
Telephone number	01289 306390

Age group	3–19
Inspection date	7 July 2009
Inspection number	327715

Fax number

01289 306994

Age group 3–19

Inspection date 7 July 2009

Inspection number 327715

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school for pupils with a very wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All have a statement of special educational need reflecting the severity and profundity of their difficulties. Many pupils have additional complex difficulties, often relating to autistic spectrum disorders. There are about twice as many boys as girls. Nearly all pupils are of White British origin and all speak English as their main language. About one third of the pupils are supported through Northumberland's Children with Disabilities Team, with varying degrees of respite care. Pupils are admitted from a wide catchment area at varying times in their school lives. Their social and economic backgrounds are very diverse but broadly representative of the community as a whole.

The few pupils admitted to the Early Years Foundation Stage typically have profound and multiple learning difficulties that have been identified at birth.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It excels in all the areas that parents hold most dear and that serve the best needs of the pupils. Pupils are happy and are kept safe. Their personal development is outstanding. This makes a huge contribution to their happiness, safety, health and prospects of future well-being. A majority of parents responded to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection and expressed no criticism. Many took the opportunity to thank the staff for the support they offered, not only to their children, but also to themselves and their families. Of particular importance, they appreciated the ease with which they could communicate with the school and the way in which it offered so many activities in out-of-school times. These are hugely appreciated by many parents, thoroughly enjoyed by pupils and contribute enormously to extending and enriching the excellent curriculum.

The school is exceptionally well led, managed and governed. It is highly respected in the community, by the local authority and by the many other agencies and professionals with which it works so closely and effectively to secure positive outcomes and futures for pupils. The school enthusiastically seeks and accepts advice about how it can keep improving. As a result it has improved since the previous inspection and demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain and continue this improvement.

Good teaching results in pupils learning well and making good progress. Younger pupils are usually admitted at the very earliest stages of learning and development. Those arriving later in their lives usually show a lesser degree of learning difficulty or disability, but nevertheless have severe and often complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Parents strongly agree that their children are making good progress, and this is evident in the fact that many pupils exceed expectations and gain nationally recognised qualifications before leaving school. These qualifications represent good achievement at the low level of attainment dictated by pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Just occasionally, there is a small imbalance in the focus on promoting learning equally to personal development.

The care, guidance and support offered to pupils is exemplary. The potential vulnerability of pupils is fully recognised and respected by all staff. Safeguarding procedures are rigorously applied. This generates a wholesome atmosphere of care and protection, much appreciated by parents.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. All pupils leaving Year 11 stay on at school and join it to build upon their previous successes and prepare for life after school. In the sixth form, learners demonstrate the progress they have made in earlier years by becoming increasingly socially confident and responsible. They are keen to try new experiences and show a growing understanding of the changes and challenges about to face them on leaving school. Sixth formers provide positive role models for younger pupils and support many of them in voluntary activities. They undertake work-experience activities diligently and record what they have learned about what it takes to be a valued employee. Some pupils leave having achieved GCSE qualifications. Added to this, they take a central role in developing their own leaving plans, adapting and modifying these in the light of emerging choices and developments.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Very few children have been admitted to the Early Years Foundation Stage in recent years. In most cases their learning and development difficulties have been identified as profound and multiple from birth or shortly afterwards. The school provides outstandingly well for these children, ensuring that they are given the stimulus and encouragement to thrive and find comfort. Achievement is measured largely in terms of response to stimulus, such as recognition of their own name or excitement when recognising favourable situations. In these respects, children achieve well. Their personal development is outstanding. They show great enjoyment and anticipation in familiar surroundings and communicate with other children with increasing vigour. They also show a growing resolve to combat their physical disabilities, for instance by sitting without support or grasping paintbrushes or pencils. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage share the same outstanding qualities as the rest of the school. As one thankful parent commented, 'Class 1 is a very special place, they do so much to enrich our daughter's life and to support us as a family'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers focus equally on promoting both academic learning and personal development in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that pupils cannot attain the standards found in mainstream schools. However, they achieve well, meeting most of their challenging personal targets, which are set in regular reviews and take into account the wishes of parents and pupils. Groups of pupils displaying different characteristics are very small so the school pays more attention to monitoring individual progress than that of discrete groups. On the evidence of these checks, no pupils can be seen to be achieving either more or less than any other when taking into account all of their personal circumstances. In the case of pupils arriving at the start of their formal schooling, attainment on entry is often at the very earliest stages of learning and development. The good progress of these pupils throughout the school is often not measurable in conventional terms but is clearly evident in their growing ability to communicate and make choices. Other pupils enter school at a standard much lower than Level 1 of the National Curriculum. These pupils also make good progress, measured very precisely by a system known as 'B squared', which precisely identifies the very small steps through which pupils make progress. A few pupils make sufficient progress to register at the lower levels of the National Curriculum before they leave. Very occasionally, individuals reach higher levels. A minority of pupils achieve nationally recognised qualifications before leaving school. There is no marked difference in pupils' achievements in different subjects or at different ages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The promotion of pupils' personal development and well-being are central to the role of the school and the wishes of parents because these are the things that have the greatest impact on improving pupils' lives and prospects for the future. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their well-being are outstanding. Pupils love coming to school and attend

whenever they can. Attendance compares favourably with similar schools, with nearly all absence being accounted for by unavoidable circumstances relating to pupils' difficulties and disabilities. Pupils take great pride in their excellent behaviour, recognising that this is a hugely important factor in making their own and other pupils' lives safer and happier. Pupils are given immense support to help keep themselves safe. They learn, for instance, how to avoid unwanted attention and about what they can do to prevent accidents. Health is a major issue for many pupils and they are very aware of the importance of taking exercise and eating sensibly. Pupils are energetic at breaktimes, making extensive use of bikes and trikes. Younger pupils delight in playing vigorously in the purpose built soft-play room. The school has been granted many awards in recognition of its promotion of healthy lifestyles. Pupils are very aware of the contribution they can make to the community. There is a thriving and influential school council, and all pupils develop a particularly good awareness of important environmental issues. The outstanding progress pupils make in their personal development means that they have excellent prospects of becoming valued and respected members of society in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There are outstanding elements in the promotion of care and personal development in most lessons. However, the wholly desirable extra emphasis that is placed on pupils' personal development and well-being, just occasionally erodes the attention placed on learning. Occasionally, the balance between the two is slightly uneven. In the words of a parent, 'The teaching is fresh and imaginative, the staff are caring and put more into the school than just teaching'. Teachers manage large staff teams very skilfully, ensuring that assistants play an important part in helping pupils to learn as well as ensuring that they are comfortable and well looked after. Excellent behaviour management ensures that lessons are very rarely interrupted and that happy and safe pupils can concentrate on their learning. Relationships are excellent. The classrooms are a delight. Vivid and informative displays, often including examples of pupils' best work, provide a very stimulating learning environment. Work is closely tailored to the needs of individuals, clearly informed by the results of accurate, ongoing assessment, to which pupils contribute by talking about what they have learned and remembered from previous lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum meets all requirements and exceeds most. The extended curriculum is a strength of the school. It is much enjoyed by pupils, and is welcomed by parents. In the words of one, 'We also have a wonderful provision of after-school clubs and holiday clubs, which I know all of the parents really appreciate'. The curriculum strongly promotes personal development alongside good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Pupils are given many opportunities to make valuable contributions to the community, for instance by tending the school garden and participating in fundraising activities. The gaining of the Green Flag Eco award is testament to the outstanding way in which the curriculum promotes ecological awareness and responsibility. Many pupils benefit from the opportunity to spend time in mainstream schools to broaden their experiences. Visiting specialists contribute enormously to pupils' enjoyment of school and their cultural development. These have included Latin American and steel drum musicians. The curriculum responds

exceptionally well to the individual needs of pupils. It provides a wealth of sensory experiences for younger pupils and those with the most profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Older pupils benefit from extensive opportunities to gain qualifications and learn about the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are given exceptional guidance and support and the level of care is outstanding. Care, guidance and support extend well beyond the bounds of the school: in the words of one parent, 'To me and my son, school is like an extended family, all the staff are willing to help any child or parent and thanks to them it makes our lives a little easier'. Parents are unanimous in feeling particularly well informed about the progress their children are making, and how they can contribute. Arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of pupils are extensive and rigorous, and health and safety are extremely effectively managed. Extra support is arranged for any pupil in need of it. This includes the contributions of a wide range of therapists and medical support. Educational guidance and support is outstanding, helped by a growing amount of accurate assessment data. This data and information from regular reviews involving staff, parents and pupils feed into excellent individual education plans with clearly identified targets against which progress can be measured.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. They have made a huge contribution to sustained improvement over many years and created an environment of high expectations where ongoing improvement can be confidently expected, aided by perceptive, accurate self evaluation. Parents express huge support for the school and see it as a privilege for their children to attend. Through outstanding leadership the headteacher, helped by governors, has built up a high performing, happy and dedicated staff. The school is considerably oversubscribed, such is its reputation for success. It represents excellent value for money. Exceptional attention is paid to ensuring that all pupils share equal opportunities to achieve success. An outstanding programme of performance management linked to equally impressive, high quality, opportunities for all staff to participate in continuing professional development have resulted in the formation of a highly skilled staff team. Multi-professional links are very well managed to help pupils and their parents lead less complicated lives. Staff participate extensively in community outreach work and regularly support other schools with regard to developing individualised programmes for pupils with additional needs. This is just one of the ways that the school contributes to community cohesion. It goes well beyond this, by ensuring that pupils gain an invaluable understanding of cultures and societies from further afield and through participation in charitable fundraising and community events which have a global impact.

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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?	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?	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?	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?	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.

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	
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?	2	2
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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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

9 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Grove Special School, Northumberland, TD15 2EN

What a joy it was to visit your wonderful school the other day. You made me very welcome. Special thanks to those of you who shared a bit of your time with me to tell me what you thought about the school. You made it very clear to me that you are very proud of your school and very happy to attend. I also noticed how enthusiastic your staff were. They seem just as happy as yourselves to come to school. This is probably because it is so outstandingly well run.

I visit schools such as yours to see how you are getting on and if there is anything I could suggest to make your school even better. That last bit poses a bit of a problem in your school because so much about it is already outstanding. Most importantly, you clearly enjoy school and make sure that you play your part in keeping it safe by behaving exceptionally well. This also pleases your parents. It was good to see you working so hard in class and also playing hard at breaktimes. I thought your classrooms were lovely, with lots of bright displays. Your topic work on tropical rainforests was fantastic. I was pleased to see that you are all making good progress in class because you are well taught.

Before I left, I asked your headteacher to see what could be done to make your learning as outstanding as your personal development.

Carry on the good work, good luck for the future and have a happy summer holiday.

All the best

Yours faithfully

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector