

Caroline Chisholm School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 134177 |
| Local Authority | Northamptonshire |
| Inspection number | 328846 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 June 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Cliff Mainey |

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.

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| Type of school | All-through |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1480 |
| Sixth form | 207 |
| 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 | G Amos |
| Headteacher | Tony Downing |
| Date of previous school inspection | 16 May 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Wooldale Road Wootton Fields Northampton NN4 6TP |
| Telephone number | 01604 669200 |
| Fax number | 01604 669201 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Caroline Chisholm School opened in 2004 in a semi-rural setting and is at the heart of a centre for learning for the community, including a public library and a nursery. Caroline Chisholm School is an all-through school with pupils aged from four to 18, and has business and enterprise specialist status. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and some are from different minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. There is special provision made for secondary-age pupils with autism or Asperger's syndrome. This group of pupils are fully integrated into main school classes. The school has been successful in achieving Healthy Schools accreditation.

The school has provision on its school site for nought to three-year-olds. This is inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Caroline Chisholm School provides an outstanding quality of education. Pupils achieve well academically, build outstanding personal qualities and gain immense enjoyment from their studies due to the school's provision. Parents identify that teachers are enthusiastic and encourage pupils to aim high.

The excellent leadership of the principal and vice principals, coupled with support from the high calibre leadership team, has secured an impressive track record of improvement and is driving the school forward at a very rapid pace. Through rigorous self-evaluation leaders at all levels accurately identify where development is needed and are making timely improvements to ensure better outcomes for learners. School improvement planning is detailed and well prioritised and provides a highly effective tool for measuring the impact of actions taken. Governors provide constructive, critical challenge, seek best value in all decisions and ensure full accountability. All of these features are supporting the school's outstanding capacity to continue to build for success.

Pupils achieve well during their time at school. The outstanding nurturing environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage makes sure pupils receive a flying start. Pupils continue to make good progress over their time at school, though progress in Key Stage 3 is not quite as consistent as in other key stages. Overall current standards are above average at the end of all key stages and have kept pace with the national trend at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils with learning difficulties, including those with specific needs, make progress which is at least as good as other pupils and often exceptional because of the high quality of expert support they receive.

Teaching is good overall and results in good learning for pupils of different abilities. Some teaching is outstanding and features challenging activities and effective questioning that engage and enthuse the pupils so that they extend their knowledge and build new skills at a brisk pace, and really enjoy their studies. Occasionally pace and challenge are less in evidence in otherwise satisfactory lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3, and in these instances pupils' interest wanes and progress slackens. The use of marking and feedback to help learners know how to improve their work is also variable. Where these are strongest they provide valuable information to pupils to enable them to become more responsible for their own learning.

The curriculum is outstanding and plans are well advanced to make it even better, for example with a further expansion of vocational provision. There is very positive impact from the school's business specialism that results in a strong enterprise culture and good work ethic in all years. The curriculum fully provides for learners of all abilities and maintains high levels of challenge and interest. There is outstanding enrichment of the curriculum with extensive out of school sports and arts clubs and many other activities such as drama, gospel singing and school choirs.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour is particularly good and pupils feel very safe. There is very little bullying and robust systems are in place to deal with any that may happen. Very positive relationships and a well-developed curriculum mean that pupils enjoy their lessons and are able to make good learning gains both inside and outside the classroom. A high degree of responsibility is given to pupils and as a result they feel valued and contribute to the development of the school through the school council's numerous subcommittees. Examples of recent successful student council-led initiatives include eco schools, business and enterprise and healthy schools projects. Significant emphasis is given to health education, personal lifestyle choices and how to stay safe, and pupils' understanding of these

areas is very good. They have a sound understanding of the range of cultures around the world, in Britain and in their local area.

Comments in the Ofsted parent questionnaire were very largely supportive of the school. For example: 'My daughter is very happy at school and we are very happy with her education and think she is doing very well' and 'Great staff and lovely children, looking forward to sending my other child starting in September!'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school is taking its first cohort of pupils through A2 examinations. There are no A-level results available to comment on but inspection of school data and lesson observations indicate that pupils make good progress and achieve well in the sixth form. Current standards in Years 12 and 13 exceed predictions based on pupils' GCSE results and are in line with or exceed national standards. Tracking systems are robust, enabling performance of individual pupils and departments to be monitored easily and underperformance challenged effectively.

Self-evaluation is at an early stage due to the very recent establishment of the sixth form but there is exemplary practice in the rest of the school on which to build. The pupils enjoy their experience and have good attitudes towards their learning. Their personal development is outstanding with many taking on roles of responsibility both within the school and the wider community, for example as peer mentors or as part of a community volunteer scheme. This is helping them to develop into responsible young adults. Teaching is good and relationships between staff and pupils are positive. The well-qualified staff are making sure that pupils are able to engage in discussions, independent study and research. The school's laptop purchase scheme is widening access to information and communication technology and effectively supporting pupils with their sixth form studies. The retention rate on courses is high and many pupils progress to higher education. The outstanding curriculum provides a wide range of AS/A-level courses and offers a range of pathways to success for all abilities in this highly inclusive area of the school. The school is rightly intending to expand its vocational provision in the new academic year to ensure that all needs and interests are even better catered for. There is also an enrichment programme designed to deliver key Skills for Life such as economic awareness. The support and guidance the pupils receive are outstanding and help them to make good progress and well-informed choices for the future. The sixth form is well led and the day-to-day management is enhanced by the supportive work of the sixth form team of tutors.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children arrive in the Reception class from a large number of pre-school settings with skills which are broadly at the levels expected for their age. They make excellent progress through the year, so that standards are above average by the time they enter Year 1. Nearly all children reach their early learning goals by the end of the year, and a high proportion are working beyond these. Numeracy skills are particularly strong. Children settle in well and make impressive gains in their personal, social and emotional development. They work together constructively and purposefully, and are helped in this by exceptionally well-planned provision. Engaging teacher-directed activities help put into place important basic skills. Children build on these skills through purposeful activities selected and initiated by them, and often linked to a recognisable theme. They check their progress with reference to a 'task board' which keeps them on track. The environment and activities are very stimulating, and children enjoy their

learning. Children flow freely from indoor to outdoor activities, although the lack of a covered area outside one of the classrooms does offer some constraints. Children are very proud of the work they do, for example in developing their gardens of real fruit and vegetables or of colourful plants made from wood and paper! Their learning journals capture their successes and celebrate them with parents. The journals also engage parents in learning through home-school challenges. Staff assess children's development carefully and use this information to plan where further intervention is needed, for example, with letter formation for one group of pupils. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding. Planning for improvement is based on the expert knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader and rigorous self-evaluation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pace and challenge in Key Stage 3 lessons so that all pupils make consistently good or better progress.
- Improve teachers' expertise in questioning techniques, developmental marking and feedback by sharing the best practice already embedded in most subject areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils join the school with skills which are broadly in line with those levels expected for their age. Pupils make exceptional progress during the Early Years Foundation Stage to reach above average standards by the time they transfer to Year 1.

Pupils continue to make good progress and achieve well in the primary stage. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average at the end of Key Stage 1. Last year standards in English at Key Stage 2 dipped with the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 falling below the school's target. Good quality intervention, particularly to extend pupils' writing skills, has brought good improvement. Current standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science exceed those expected nationally.

Most pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 progress well and are on track to reach their target grades, thus indicating that current standards are likely to be in line with the above average level seen in past years. Occasionally in lessons at Key Stage 3 not all pupils are being sufficiently challenged to learn to their full capabilities. Current standards in Years 12 and 13 exceed predictions based on pupils' GCSE results and are in line with or exceed national standards.

One of the key factors contributing to the overall good picture of achievement is the highly effective use of performance data to track the progress pupils are making and provide targeted, individualised support to accelerate progress where necessary. This work has very good impact on supporting the tailor-made programmes of study for pupils with learning difficulties who make exceptional progress overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils display outstanding behaviour, very positive attitudes and enjoy excellent relationships with each other and staff alike. Pupils have a clear understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and benefit from the many outside links the school has developed. Pupils say they feel very valued and as a result make a strong commitment to the school, particularly through the student council which has a large number of subcommittees and contributes to

the whole-school decision-making processes very successfully. Over 90% of pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and there are many opportunities for the pupils to demonstrate leadership skills across both the primary and secondary phases, for example through the well-developed mentoring and buddying schemes. Pupils are well aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles and are aware of the importance of diet and healthy eating. Pupils identify that they feel very safe, instances of bullying are said to be rare and pupils know what to do if issues arise. There are outstanding opportunities to develop economic skills through the strong culture of business and enterprise which pervades the school. School attendance is outstanding in both the primary and secondary phases and exceeds national averages. These features are assisting the pupils in being extremely well prepared for the next stage of education and their future working lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Clear aims, regular checking of pupils' progress and well-structured conclusions to lessons are positive features found in much of the good and sometimes outstanding teaching, particularly in the school's specialist subject. In the best lessons teachers' good planning and secure subject knowledge lead to the delivery of well-focused lessons where pace and challenge, supported by effective questioning, enable pupils to make good, and increasingly outstanding progress. These features are not always evident in lessons in Key Stage 3. Here learners are not always questioned skilfully enough to help them deepen their knowledge, develop critical thinking skills and meet new challenges. Assessment practices are on the whole very good but marking is inconsistent. At its most effective, detailed information supports pupils in improving the quality of their work and encourages them to aim high. The sensible deployment and very skilful work of teaching assistants helps pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make consistently good and often exceptional progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's business and enterprise specialism is exceptionally well managed and has a very strong impact on all aspects of school life. Opportunities to develop enterprise skills permeate the whole curriculum and contribute very significantly to pupils' outstanding preparedness for later life. As a consequence, a very high proportion of pupils go on to further education, training or employment. Teachers in all subjects plan consistently to develop pupils' team-working, problem-solving, investigative and independent learning skills. As a consequence, pupils readily take responsibility for their own learning, and in lessons are highly focused on the task at hand. Excellent links with locally based business organisations drive a rich programme of work-related and enterprise activities, including highly regarded enterprise challenges and work-experience placements. Across the primary phase, the curriculum promotes the development of key learning skills through engaging themes and contexts. In the secondary phase, the curriculum is flexible enough to suit the range of interests and aptitudes of pupils. The school has well-developed links with partner colleges and work-based providers to offer a good range of vocational courses. Pupils benefit from a very strong enrichment programme, which allows them to develop their talents and interests in many areas, and especially in sport and the arts. The after-school sports programme has been particularly successful in encouraging the large majority of pupils in the school to take part. The school's programme of personal, social and health education has strong

input from a large number of external agencies and promotes a high degree of understanding of how to live safely and healthily.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding and make a very considerable contribution to their personal well-being. Safeguarding procedures for checking staff suitability are fully met. Child protection procedures are secure and health and safety matters are given a high priority. The school has correctly identified that an improvement in its record of staff training is required and is taking swift action to rectify this. Pupils are well informed about their progress and challenging targets are set in subjects for learners of all abilities. The differentiated nature of targets and support given to pupils are particularly impressive and enabling all pupils, regardless of background, to develop their knowledge and skills rapidly. Intervention strategies are quickly put in place to address any underachievement and sound academic guidance is contributing to the progress pupils are making, however some inconsistencies in the quality of marking remain to be addressed. The care, guidance and support provided for pupils with learning difficulties is exemplary throughout the school and pupils are very successfully integrated into the mainstream school. The school has very well-developed links with a range of partners and agencies to support and develop individuals and groups of pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

A crystal clear strategic direction to the work and development of the school, including a strategy for promoting an inclusive, cohesive community, are key features of the school's outstanding effectiveness. The leadership team is driven by the desire to constantly improve the outcomes for all pupils and there is no complacency. This is at the heart of everything the school leadership does and in turn is embraced by the wider united staff team. A process of rigorous self-evaluation, underpinned by a robust target setting system, has been developed since the last inspection with good attention paid to ensuring that all development planning has clear and measurable success criteria. The senior team knows the school well and is perceptive in its judgements about the strengths and areas for development and moves swiftly to rectify shortcomings. Middle leaders share the vision for the school and contribute strongly to its success. Maintaining high levels of achievement is a clear priority, but there is also an emphasis on meeting individual needs and enabling each pupil, regardless of ability, to fulfil their potential. The school's specialist business status is having a significant impact throughout the school and providing some interesting opportunities for pupils to develop new skills and work with a range of outside partners. The governing body discharges its responsibilities exceptionally well and clearly provides highly effective support and challenge to the school. Given the trends of improvement in self-evaluation, achievement and the strong and purposeful ambition towards achieving excellence, there is outstanding capacity for further improvement.

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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 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

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 | 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 | 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? | 2 | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 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 | |
| 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 | 1 | |
| 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 | 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |
| 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**

19 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Caroline Chisholm School, Wootton Fields, Northampton, NN4 6TP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. You were very friendly and helped us make our judgements by giving us lots of useful information. You told us your school was fantastic and you are right – you go to an outstanding school.

These are the main things we found out about your school.

- Pupils get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Good academic performance, strong personal development and well-honed enterprise skills are preparing you well for the future.
- Teaching is good and is helping you learn successfully.
- Most of you make good and sometimes excellent progress and you enjoy being at school a great deal – your attendance is extremely good.
- You behave outstandingly well and get on very well with each other.
- The student council is doing an excellent job and helping the principal improve your school even more.
- All of you take on a lot of responsibilities and the school values your opinions.
- You eat healthily, take part in lots of physical exercise and understand the importance of staying healthy by making sensible choices.
- The good pastoral care system supports all of you and is particularly effective in helping those of you who experience difficulties from time to time.
- Those of you in the sixth form are experiencing good and improving provision.
- The principal, senior team and the governors provide outstanding leadership and are keen to make sure the school continues to be outstanding by looking for ways to improve it even more. We are sure you will continue to help with this.

We have asked the school to do the following to makes things even better.

- Improve the pace and style of questioning in lessons at Key Stage 3 so that all of you are challenged to the full in your work and make the best progress possible.
- Make sure that questioning, marking and written feedback from teachers are as good as they can be in all your subjects.

Once again thank you for welcoming us to your school and for being so helpful. Yours faithfully

Cliff Mainey

Lead inspector