

The Cedars School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108422
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	337070
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2010
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	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maria Hall
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Fraser
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons, seeing eight different teachers and all but two of the class groups. Over 40% of inspection time was spent looking at pupils' learning. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including that relating to the assessment of pupils' progress, governing body minutes, the school improvement plan, documents relating to the evaluation and development of the school's designation as a sports college and those relating to the successful bid for Trust status. Sixteen parental questionnaires, along with 52 from pupils and 29 from staff, were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the degree to which all pupils are set challenging work
- the effectiveness with which teachers address pupils' very short attention spans the impact of Sports College and Trust status
- the effectiveness of recent changes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

Pupils exhibit a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The main groups are those with physical, behavioural, communication or cognitive difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, identifying the severity and complexity of their difficulties. A very small minority of pupils are on the autism spectrum. A few pupils have deteriorating conditions, some of which are life limiting. Nearly all pupils are White British. Boys outnumber girls by about two-to-one. Very few pupils are looked after children.

The local authority has plans to re-designate the school as an 11 to 16 school. To this end, there are currently no Early Years Foundation Stage referrals being made and from September 2010 it is likely that this will also apply to primary aged pupils. These arrangements do not affect those pupils already on roll.

The school was awarded Sports College status in September 2007 and gained Trust status in January 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a happy, safe and effective school. Pupils enjoy attending, parents are overwhelmingly supportive and staff are proud to work there. Typical of parental comments is, 'My child would not be the confident, happy child she is without the support and guidance she receives at The Cedars.'

The school has several outstanding features. Most of these relate to the personal development of pupils, to their care, guidance and support, and to the way in which the school works closely with parents to secure positive outcomes. Safeguarding procedures are also outstandingly effective. These are all crucially important areas, given the emotional and physical vulnerability of many pupils.

Nearly all pupils make good progress because they are well taught. There are mitigating reasons, usually related to health, for the few who do not make the progress initially expected of them. Through the way it checks on pupils' progress, the school has identified recently that pupils in Key Stage 3 are making slightly better progress in English than they are in mathematics. The actions to address this issue have not been in place long enough yet to have succeeded fully. Many pupils have very short attention spans. Teachers take care to vary tasks within lessons to help overcome this barrier. However, lessons are on occasions too long and pupils lose concentration after a while.

The school has improved since the last inspection. Leaders and managers have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the embedding of ambition and drive to secure improvement and contribute to the community is evident in the acquisition of Specialist College and Trust status. The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Close the gap quickly between progress in English and mathematics in Key Stage 3.
- Review the timetable in the near future and make adjustments so that the length of lessons, particularly those of a more theoretical nature, is shortened to provide a better match with pupils' attention spans.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy school: they achieve well and make good progress in lessons because they are well taught and they work hard and with enthusiasm. Attainment on entry is frequently very low, especially amongst the youngest pupils. However, soon after entry, pupils start to make progress and this improves strongly as they develop and get older.

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Nearly all parents feel that their children are making good progress and this was confirmed during the inspection, with pupils making good progress in the majority of lessons observed. The highest attaining students gain success in GCSE examinations, usually with grades in the D to G range. It is much more usual for pupils' achievement to be recognised in the form of success in Entry Level, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network awards. These results demonstrate how well pupils build on prior learning and benefit from the cumulative effect of good teaching. Particularly good progress is made in personal and social development and in physical education, both of which are linked closely to the school's specialist status. There are only minor differences in the progress of different groups of pupils although the school identified recently that by the end of Key Stage 3, students make slightly better progress in English than in mathematics.

Pupils are almost unanimous in saying that they feel safe. They demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to avoid situations that could put them at risk. They, and their parents, are greatly reassured that staff are well skilled to deal with emergencies that in some cases could be life threatening. Staff are extremely effective in training older students to travel independently and to recognise the risks and responsibilities that this entails.

Behaviour is usually good. Lessons are only rarely disrupted. When they are it is usually because of the underlying conditions associated with pupils' special needs. Pupils are exceptionally polite and considerate of one another. Bullying is extremely rare, as is damage to property. Several pupils voice criticism of behaviour but on the evidence of inspection this reflects more on the fact that they are affronted by errant behaviour rather than worried about it. This demonstrates their heightened moral values. Pupils also develop excellent social skills as they are encouraged to work together and help each other to achieve success. A strong sense of spirituality is engendered through the school's fostering of celebration and respect for each other's feelings.

The extent to which pupils develop an awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles is amply demonstrated by their enthusiasm for participating in sport and strenuous activity. Both are strongly supported by the school's specialist status. At the Disability Sport England National Mini Games the school recently won an award for the team of the championship.

Attendance is around the national average and unauthorised absence is very rare. Medical conditions account for a large part of all absence. It is the impact of these conditions which mitigates more against pupil's future prospects than the absence caused by them.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are adept at creating a classroom environment that is both stimulating and welcoming. Relationships are excellent. The incorporation of different activities within lessons helps to sustain pupils' interest and concentration even though some lessons are over-long. An English lesson which extended over two hours included a good range of different activities, punctuated by short breaks for comfort and reinvigoration. However, in another lesson, where there was less variety in the tasks, the pace slowed as the lesson proceeded and pupils became increasingly passive. Questioning is used well to determine pupils' understanding of what is being taught and what they have remembered. Pupils are regularly given useful tips to help them improve their work. All staff show an excellent awareness of the medical or emotional difficulties pupils face and how these difficulties affect pupils' learning. Overall, tasks are well matched to individual ability and ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged in lessons.

The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of activities which are well balanced between pupils' personal and academic development. There is a good balance between subjects over the course of the week but on a day-to-day basis this is sometimes lost, such as when a Year 9 group has a Tuesday timetable that includes two English and two art lessons in the five lesson day. This arrangement is not best suited to the needs of pupils. The curriculum is frequently adjusted effectively to allow the withdrawal of pupils with specific needs to receive specialist help including, for instance, enhanced mobility and sensory input. Enrichment opportunities are many, varied and much enjoyed by pupils. They support learning across the curriculum well and frequently contribute to pupils' awareness of other countries and societies. The school's specialism has facilitated

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the development of excellent sporting links at a local and national level.

Care, guidance and support are at the very heart of the school and, alongside pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, they help to define the school's excellent ethos. Pupils particularly appreciate the support and guidance that is extended to them in helping to make decisions about the future; also the excellent advice they are given to help them manage their personal health and safety. A wide range of specialists, including health workers and therapists, provide invaluable additional support for individual pupils. Parents express total confidence in the skills of staff to keep their children safe and to deal with medical or emotional emergencies.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and managers instil in all staff a strong sense of purpose and a dedication to seek the best for all pupils. Parents are regularly consulted and always involved in the making of decisions which affect their children. Leaders and managers listen to pupils' views and take them into good account when planning for the future. A simple demonstration of this has been pupil involvement in the design of the new school uniform. Realistic targets are set for pupils' progress and for improving attendance and most are met, with the result that outcomes are at least good and in some aspects outstanding.

The governing body is hugely supportive and members have played an important part in the school's successful drive to attain Trust status. The forward thinking of leaders, managers and governors identified the Trust and specialist status as an ideal means to extend the school's work in community cohesion. This work is helping pupils after they have left school, focussing strongly on the disabled community in Gateshead. Although Trust status was only recently granted, the preparatory work is already showing an impact, with private funding having been secured for a social enterprise café.

Inclusion is strongly promoted through excellent links with other schools and colleges. A group of Year 12 students, for instance, maintain access to the skills of Cedars' staff and resources even though they have transferred to the roll of a nearby comprehensive school. Through its specialist status the school is able to offer expert support to many pupils with disabilities from other schools. This support helped a group of pupils with severe learning difficulties from a neighbouring special school to gain passes in Entry Level physical education last year.

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Equal opportunities are well promoted. The effectiveness of this is clearly evident in the fact that no group of pupils is making significantly different progress to any other. The school identifies where pupils could be progressing better and takes prudent action. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Excellent procedures ensure that potential risk in any activity is minimised. The physical and mental health of pupils is rigorously attended to, taking full account of the limitations of a few pupils to communicate their concerns. Governors are well trained in safeguarding issues and play an important role in ensuring that only suitable adults are employed. The school's work with the multitude of other agencies and professionals concerned with the well-being of pupils is exemplary.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

This year there have been radical changes in the Early Years foundation Stage. A new temporary leader has been appointed. This new leadership has rapidly introduced changes to the curriculum and the assessment of children's progress. The curriculum is based on the best practice for very young children. A good variety of learning spaces has been developed to allow children to learn through exploration and play. Use of the outdoor area remains underdeveloped because there is no continuous access to it from the classroom. Nevertheless, it is well used at regular intervals throughout the day. Teaching is good, in that it captures the attention of children and holds it by ensuring that activities are varied and well resourced. Many of the children admitted at this very early age are amongst the most vulnerable in the school. Some have very limited powers of communication and mobility but all are making good progress. In the past,

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children's personal and social development has tended to outshine their acquisition of communication and number skills, but a more balanced curriculum is now in place. Good leadership and management ensure that skilled support staff play a hugely important role in observing and recording the very small signs of progress each child makes. Anecdotal observations are now collated and incorporated into a Foundation Stage Profile for each child, thus creating a systematic record of progress that can be compared with other children. The same, outstanding, level of care, guidance and support as is found in the rest of the school is clearly evident.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents voice considerable support for the school's work and the way it is helping their children to thrive. They overwhelmingly agree that the school keeps their children happy and safe and that good teaching is helping their children to make good progress. Parents are particularly pleased with the ways in which the school keeps in touch with them and involves them fully in helping them to help their own children. Many parents are particularly appreciative of the ways in which the school helps their children to become more independent and grow in confidence. Several parents were thrilled that their children had been taken on a trip to London recently, the first time they had ever stayed away from home. Another was just as pleased that her child now has the confidence to visit the local corner shop on his own.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Cedars School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 16 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 69 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	75	3	19	1	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	75	4	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	50	8	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	50	7	44	0	0	1	6
The teaching is good at this school	10	63	5	31	1	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	56	6	38	1	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	63	5	31	1	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	50	5	31	0	0	1	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	63	5	31	0	0	1	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	56	5	31	1	6	1	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	44	8	50	1	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	69	3	19	2	13	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	69	4	25	0	0	1	6

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Cedars School, Gateshead, NE9 6QD

Thank you for making my colleague and I so welcome when we visited your school the other day. It was a delight to meet you. Rarely do I see so many smiling faces and such a willingness to talk about your experiences and the things you do in school. What is equally important is that all your views were so positive.

At the end of our two days in school we decided that The Cedars is a good school. A lot of things about it are outstanding.

You make good progress because you are well taught. Some of you are making slightly better progress in English than in mathematics, so we have recommended that the school quickly ensures this is put right. You are given lots of opportunities to learn about a wide range of things in, and out, of the classroom. A few of you did say that some of your lessons are too long. We agree with you and staff have told us that they will look into this and make changes.

It is very clear that you enjoy school and feel safe. So you should, because you are exceptionally well cared for, guided and supported. It was good to see you behaving so well during our visit.

The people who lead and manage your school clearly want the best for each of you. On our evidence they are certainly working effectively to fulfil that aim.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector

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