

Northern Counties School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108551
Local Authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	337101
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Allan Lacey HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Wignall
Headteacher	Ms Judith James
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2006
School address	Great North Road Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tyne and Wear NE2 3BB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited 11 lessons and observed nine teachers. The inspector held meetings with governors, staff, parents and carers, and groups of pupils. He observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including policies, the school improvement plan and an analysis of the school's records of pupils' progress and attainment. The inspector analysed 21 completed questionnaires from parents and carers as well as a number of questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the consistency and effectiveness of teaching throughout the school
- how well leaders use relevant information about the school's performance to devise, implement, monitor and adjust plans and policies to secure improvement
- how well assessment is used to inform teaching and set challenging targets for learning
- how well pupils make progress relative to their starting points in literacy and numeracy
- the extent to which the curriculum meets the needs of individuals and groups of pupils and prepares them for the next step in their lives

Information about the school

Northern Counties School is a non-maintained special school that provides for pupils with significant hearing impairment, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum conditions. Four pupils are looked after by the local authority. All pupils have statements of special educational need. A lower-than-average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The remaining pupils are from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds, although all speak English as a first language. There are almost twice as many boys as girls at the school. The school holds a number of awards including the Healthy Schools award, Enviro Schools award and the Activemark 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

Northern Counties is a good school which successfully puts pupils' learning and well-being at the heart of its work. Each pupil is viewed as an individual who can learn, succeed and realise his or her full potential. Health and educational professionals work together to ensure that the care needs of pupils are exceptionally well met. Pupils say that they love coming to school and feel extremely safe and secure. One older pupil spoke for many of her friends when she said, 'School is like my second family.' Parents and carers are very supportive of the school, typical comments include, 'We are totally confident in the care and support the staff give, they really do care so much about these children.'

All groups of pupils make good gains in learning in the vast majority of lessons. From very low starting points, all pupils make good progress in mathematics, literacy and communication skills and personal, social and health education. Pupils' extremely positive attitudes and excellent behaviour are strengths of their learning. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to take responsibility within the school and see themselves very much part of a team working together. Pupils make a good contribution to the local community with many very worthwhile and innovative links being made. Pupils who are able to do so demonstrate an outstanding level of understanding about the need to eat healthily and take plenty of exercise. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. Many are reflective and show great understanding and respect for other people's cultures, values and feelings.

The very large majority of teaching is good and some is outstanding. Consequently, activities are usually well matched to pupils' needs and they enjoy their lessons and learn well. The curriculum provision is well organised and imaginative and impacts positively on pupils' motivation and progress. The curriculum is enriched by the school's numerous links, partnerships and creative opportunities, which contribute very well to pupils' enjoyment of school. Equality of opportunity is promoted extremely effectively and all pupils are given equal access to everything the school has to offer.

The senior leadership team is driving the pursuit of excellence, and has set an ambitious agenda for improvement and development. This has been very successful and has resulted in considerable improvement in a number of key areas, for example, a significant improvement in the quality of teaching. Leaders have developed a good view of what needs to be done to improve although the analysis and evaluation of how teaching is impacting on pupils' achievement is not quite as rigorous as it might be. The monitoring of teaching and learning is comprehensive and well developed. Occasionally, lesson monitoring focuses too much on teaching and not enough on pupils' learning and achievement. The governing body has provided effective support and challenge in taking

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the school forward. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and what it needs to do to improve.

The good procedures for safeguarding meet all statutory requirements and underpin the school's caring approach. The school has excellent partnerships with community groups, external services and local schools to promote the care and learning of its pupils. The school has extremely effective relationships with parents and carers. The effective leadership of the school, the good record of pupils' progress and developed systems for school self-evaluation indicate that this school has a good capacity to improve further

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning and hence pupils' achievement by;
 - improving the effectiveness of lesson observations by consistently focussing on the learning and progress of all pupils
 - improving the sharpness of the analysis of how well pupils progress and building this information more effectively into the monitoring of teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils' join the school with levels of attainment that vary very widely, but it is always below that expected for their age and usually low due to their complex needs. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with autistic spectrum conditions make good progress in relation to their starting points, capabilities and individual targets, especially in communication. Hearing impaired pupils make progress that is nearly always better than might be expected, given their learning difficulties or in comparison to similar children with similar needs. All pupils show high levels of enthusiasm from the moment they arrive at school each morning. Their positive attitudes carry on throughout the day into their lessons. Their enthusiasm and outstanding behaviour are key factors supporting their good learning and the effective consolidation and development of key skills

Pupils' indicate that they feel entirely safe in school and many have an excellent understanding of what constitutes safe behaviour. There have been no incidents of bullying or harassment and the pupils said firmly that their friends are always nice to them. If they are able to do so pupils are confident to ask staff for help and approach them on a range of issues, including making suggestions about how to make the school better by using the school's suggestion box. The school takes into account the views of the pupils well and they are used to inform future school progress. The lack of a school council limits the opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge and understanding in this area. All pupils show complete trust and confidence in the staff to interpret their needs. One older pupil described the feelings of many when he said, 'You are safe here, there are no bullies and we are all friends. We all grow up together!'

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Many have an excellent understanding that eating sensibly and plenty of exercise helps them stay healthy. They participate enthusiastically in sporting, residential trips and physical activities such as rebound therapy. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They understand the difference between right and wrong, take responsibility for their own actions and are proud of their achievements. Their behaviour is excellent. By the time they leave the school, pupils become mature and responsible young people who are confident and have high self-esteem. They are well prepared for the move to the next step in their lives. Older pupils successfully study courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications through organisations such as the Award Scheme Development and Assessment Network. The school has increased the opportunities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to access and succeed in these courses.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

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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Teaching observed during the inspection ranged from good to outstanding quality. Staff are careful to make distinctive provision for pupils with specific needs. Teaching assistants support pupils' learning and development well. Detailed planning provides challenging work for all groups of pupils, as it is based on an accurate assessment of pupils' prior learning.

Pupils are learning what is right for them as the curriculum is successful in leading them towards independence. Hearing impaired pupils are challenged to work at levels in the subjects that are expected for their age. For profound and multiple learning difficulty pupils and those with autistic spectrum conditions, work is correctly focused more directly on gaining basic skills and increasing independence. Activities such as themed days and lunch-time clubs help to enrich the provision

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. Pupils feel well cared for because the school works hard to know every pupil as an individual. This approach, alongside very good checks on pupils' progress, means that the staff know when to give the right level of challenge and support, which helps to ensure that the pupils do the best they can in all their work. The school has a realistic and proportionate approach to safety and safeguarding permeates all aspects of the school's life.

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?

The leadership of the school is characterised at all levels by a commitment to equality and diversity which ensures that each pupil fulfils his or her potential. The headteacher provides committed leadership and has continued to move the school forward since the last inspection. She has successfully created an environment in which all staff feel they can take responsibility and make a significant contribution to the continuing improvement of the school. The staff's passion and commitment are very evident in their pupils' enjoyment in coming to school and in the very positive esteem that the school is held in by parents.

The leadership team monitors the quality of teaching regularly and provides effective guidance to enable teachers to improve their planning, subject knowledge and use of assessment. However, the quality of lesson observations is varied and occasionally focuses too much upon what the teacher is doing rather than what the pupils are learning and achieving. Morale is high and staff demonstrate a determination to further improve the provision. They are constantly seeking ways to develop their practice. The

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leadership team makes effective use of its tracking procedures to ensure that individual pupil progress is accessed well. However, the school's analysis of this information is limited slightly as the link between the quality of teaching and the outcomes it produces for pupils is not fully developed.

The school works extremely well with external partners to ensure that specialist support of the highest quality is very well matched to the needs of those pupils who receive it. The school has also achieved considerable success in removing any barriers to learning experienced by individuals or specific groups of pupils. Equality of opportunity is promoted extremely effectively through the curriculum and there are detailed analyses of outcomes to ensure both equality and challenge for all. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. It plays a very valuable part in the local community and increasingly with the wider community, including class links with other countries. The school is aware that in order to build on its analysis of its contribution to community cohesion, it needs to evaluate the impact of the relatively recently introduced actions it has taken.

Parents appreciate the excellent steps which the school takes to make sure they are involved, saying, for example, 'We feel that we really work together, there is no them and us, we are a team.' Governors are knowledgeable about the school and provide a good level of challenge and support. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Procedures for safeguarding and child protection are good. Where there are concerns about a child, action is taken and excellent use made of other agencies to support pupils and their families.

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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Sixth form

In the sixth form students make good progress in their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and, with effective questioning and good pace, engage students well. Activities are sharply focused on individual students' learning needs. The curriculum successfully supports students to develop their basic skills, such as communication and literacy, as well as their interpersonal and life skills. The range of courses is good, building on students' prior learning and allowing them to gain qualifications at the next level. Courses are well tailored to students' needs and interests and there is an increasing level of choice. Staff treat the students as mature young people, and the students respond accordingly. The same outstanding care, guidance and support are as evident in the sixth form as in the main school. This is highly successful in helping students to transfer smoothly to new placements beyond school, and to adjust to these quickly and successfully. Strong leadership has been effective in establishing provision of good quality, and leaders are clear about how it should be developed further.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Half of the parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. A very large majority of questionnaires showed that parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school. They indicate that their children enjoy school and are safe there. All respondents consider the school to be well led and managed, that teaching is good and that it helps their children to be healthy. All say that the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. Many comment on the high level of support they have received from staff. Their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote, 'Our son has come on so well here and we believe that is down to the teachers and teaching assistants. We cannot thank the school enough for everything that they have done. Everyone at the school is so dedicated to their pupils, and they are always there to help.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northern Counties 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 inspector received 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 50 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	67	7	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	81	4	19	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	71	5	24	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	16	76	5	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	71	5	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	71	5	24	0	0	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)	15	71	4	19	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	81	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	81	4	19	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	86	3	14	0	0	0	0

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



28 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northern Counties School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE2 3BB

Thank you very much for being so kind and friendly when I visited your school. I really enjoyed spending time with you and seeing how hard you work.

I found that your school is a good school. You work very hard in lessons and do well in your learning. It was good to see how really happy you are in school and that you feel completely safe. The school is very good at making sure you are exceptionally well cared for. I was pleased that you have an excellent understanding of keeping healthy and it was good to hear about all the different sports and activities you are involved in. Your teachers know you well and help you learn a lot of things.

The school is well led and I have asked the staff to do two things to make the school even better. I have asked them to make sure that they watch even more carefully how you are progressing in lessons and how the teaching is helping you to learn. You can help by continuing to work hard.

You have a lot to be proud of about your school.

Yours sincerely

Mr Allan Lacey

Lead inspector

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