

Sunningdale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108882
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	337171
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2010
Reporting inspector	John Farrow

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	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Toni Mathieson
Headteacher	Mrs Celia Wright
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons were observed, involving 10 teachers. Discussions were held with staff, governors and a representative group of parents and carers. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including that relating to the safeguarding of pupils, teachers' planning and pupils' progress. Thirty-three parents' and carers' questionnaires and 10 staff questionnaires were scrutinised. No pupil questionnaires were administered but inspectors took account of the pupils' views expressed in a recent internal survey.

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

- how well communication is promoted and developed across the school
- whether pupils' individual learning targets are sufficiently ambitious in relation to their ability needs and interests
- how well the curriculum is adapted to meet the widely differing needs of different groups of pupils.

Information about the school

This is a school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils are drawn from across the City of Sunderland. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are White British and almost twice as many boys attend than girls. The school caters for a small minority of looked after children.

The school manages a portage service and language and learning partnership on behalf of the local authority and is a 'change school', working to promote creative practices within and beyond the school. The school has achieved the Basic Skills award and Healthy School status.

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 good school. It has continued to improve steadily since its last inspection and provides outstanding care, guidance and highly individualised support for its pupils. This allows them to make the best of the opportunities provided by the school. Arrangements to promote engagement with parents and carers, and a wide range of community partners, are highly effective and make a very significant contribution to the pupils' achievements and well-being. Several parents and carers expressed their appreciation of the sensitivity and concern shown by the school when involving them in all key decisions about their children's learning and development. One foster carer's comment was typical of many when she said, 'I see the school as playing a pivotal role when planning around my child's needs. I cannot speak highly enough of their communication or effort.'

Good teaching ensures that pupils are almost always well motivated and engaged and leads to them achieving well and making good progress. The planning of lessons is detailed and thorough and, in most cases, very closely matched to the needs of each individual. Occasionally, activities designed for some pupils are not always set with the same high level of precision and then the pace of learning and development slows. The school is making increasingly effective use of emerging sources of comparative pupil performance data to check that individuals are making the best progress they can. However, the school recognises that their use of this type of information to help set shorter term learning objectives has yet to become fully embedded and that more can be done to ensure all targets set are equally challenging.

The curriculum is good and is developing rapidly. It is well matched to the pupils' needs and interests, with an effective emphasis upon the promotion of choice and the use of insightful questions within half-termly creative themes. Staff work hard to help pupils be and feel safe, and they are strongly encouraged to make sensible decisions regarding their lifestyle choices.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been tackled effectively. School leaders are justifiably proud of their highly successful work with a wide range of partners, beyond the school, that is improving learning outcomes for their pupils and those in partner schools. Senior leaders have an accurate knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, based on a thorough and uncompromising approach to self-evaluation. For example, while they can demonstrate the school makes a strong contribution to promoting community cohesion in the City, they recognise they need to be more systematic in evaluating their work in this area. Despite many recent improvements, school leaders and the governing body remain highly ambitious on behalf of their school and demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching and learning further by ensuring all teachers plan for high quality learning outcomes during more informal and independent activity, as seen in the best lessons.
- Raise achievement further by ensuring the targets set to extend pupils' progress take account of the most ambitious predictions of what similar pupils can achieve.
- Strengthen arrangements to evaluate impact of actions taken to promote community cohesion, by ensuring they are more systematic and specific.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well in lessons; they enjoy coming to school where their enthusiasm, good behaviour and ability to concentrate for long periods all make a significant contribution to the good progress they make. They always try their best, for instance, whether taking part in vigorous physical activity designed to develop their physical skills or when thinking about recent learning following activities such as 'the bear hunt'. Pupils take great pride in their work, and derive obvious pleasure and enjoyment from their successes, even if they find it hard to express their views, answer questions or join in with discussions. If, and when, more significant personal difficulties arise, such as those associated with medical concerns or distressed behaviour, other pupils help themselves by not letting this interfere with their own learning.

Most pupils join the school at the earliest stages of learning and development. For some this means their responses are initially restricted to reacting to sensory stimuli such as light, sound, touch or movement. Others can already respond appropriately to a range of forms of interpersonal communication, such as speech, sign or symbols. A few, such as those with autistic spectrum conditions, may also present a high degree of behaviour or communication difficulties. Regardless of these diverse starting points, all pupils make good progress and achieve well during their time in school.

Pupils make especially good progress developing their ability to interact and communicate more effectively with others; this is a key skill that enhances their future economic well-being. Almost all pupils attend whenever they can. The absence of a tiny minority of those with severe medical needs does impact on the school's overall attendance figures, but when these are taken into account, attendance rises to within the average range and compares favourably with similar schools. However, the school is not complacent and makes determined efforts to promote even better attendance. As a consequence, attendance is rising steadily.

Pupils feel safe because they know and trust that adults will take good care of them. Many have great difficulty expressing this for themselves but observations of their good behaviour in and around school and convincing testimony from other pupils, parents and carers, and staff strongly support this judgement. Their actions show they are proud to be members of this caring and vibrant community and they participate enthusiastically in a wide range of school and community activities designed to help themselves and

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others. Most pupils are learning to make sensible decisions about adoption of healthy lifestyle choices, for example when choosing their lunch or opting to take part in vigorous lunchtime club activities such as yoga.

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is highly effective, ensuring pupils are well motivated and engaged during lessons. Most teaching leads to good progress because teachers and teaching assistants take great care to identify precisely what they hope each pupil will learn or experience in each lesson. This is underpinned by high quality planning and approaches to assessment that reflect teachers' detailed knowledge and understanding of each pupil's needs and the very individualised small steps of learning required for them to secure their learning objectives. In the main, staff hold high and ambitious expectations of what pupils can achieve, but in some activities, particularly where children choose for themselves or

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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where learning objectives are less specific, these high expectations are not so evident, and the pace of learning slows. Teachers and teaching assistants show an in-depth knowledge of each child, and use this to forge excellent trusting and purposeful relationships with them. These contribute enormously to reinforcing pupils' confidence as learners and support their personal development very well. Behaviour is well managed, often as a result of highly skilled and effective intervention and support from teaching assistants. Very effective and imaginative use is made of a wide range of technological aids and multi-sensory therapeutic interventions to support and develop communication or to extend pupils' understanding, for instance, by linking these to a topic theme such as 'going on a journey'. Staff are also skilled in the use of sign, symbol or picture supported communication and routinely model these alongside good use of spoken language to help engage and develop pupils' attention skills.

The curriculum is well organised, imaginative and provides rich opportunities for learning activities that are well matched to pupils' individual needs and abilities. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are kept under constant review, and have recently been revitalised by the introduction of a more creative focus and a shift towards half-termly, topic-based planning. This is allowing all pupils, including those with the most profound and multiple learning difficulties, to be fully included and access a wide range of integrated activities linked to these common themes. For example, in a dynamic language and communication lesson, a group of pupils were reviewing their previous day's learning using spoken language and emergent writing, while others did so using sensory or experiential approaches, linked to the same story and experiences. Since the last inspection teachers have developed far more adventurous ways of linking learning outcomes to the excellent facilities available in the light and sound rooms. Well advanced programmes are further developing and extending curricular access within therapy areas, with an even sharper focus on meeting individual pupils' needs.

Pupils receive excellent care, guidance and support. Detailed planning successfully involves parents, carers and the many professionals and agencies working with each child, and ensures that their medical, personal, therapeutic and learning needs are fully considered and systematically met. Staff are very well trained in child protection, medical and safe handling procedures and have a thorough understanding of the correct procedures to follow in different situations. The school has done a great deal to improve attendance among its most vulnerable children, and makes stringent efforts to understand fully the learning and support needs of each new pupil before admission. The same thoroughness and sensitivity are evident when preparing pupils to manage the move to their next school. These excellent arrangements are fully endorsed by the overwhelming majority of parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>2</p>

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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?

School leaders and the governing body consistently communicate their high expectations about the actions they take to secure further improvement. This has contributed to the infectious enthusiasm and growing confidence shown by staff who are beginning to recognise the benefits of improvements recently secured. This has been achieved without detracting from the schools underlying historic strengths and means the school is well placed to achieve further improvement. Consequently, school leaders enjoy the full and active support of staff, parents and carers. The governing body has demonstrated a good capacity to act as a 'critical friend', and is systematically involved in holding the school to account. As a result, school self-evaluation is well established, rigorous and used in a reflective manner to sharply focus school improvement priorities. This is a particular strength of the school, as seen, for example, in its leaders' relentless determination to improve teaching by the progressive refinement of planning alongside more effective use of day-to-day assessment. Consequently, target-setting is increasingly rigorous, but individual targets set are still largely dependent on individual teacher's level of expertise. Senior leaders recognise the need to further integrate the use of relevant comparative pupil data into these short-term target-setting arrangements, to ensure targets become as consistently aspirational as possible.

A strong and explicit commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and fairness lies at the heart of the school values and underpins its approach to all aspects of its provision. Outcomes are carefully monitored to ensure they are equally positive for all groups of pupils, and if they are not, action follows quickly to tackle the causes of any differences. The school is a very cohesive community where students from diverse backgrounds get along very well together. The school is particularly outward-looking and highly committed to working in partnership with other schools and organisations beyond its immediate boundaries, taking on responsibilities for a range of significant enrichment activities. The contribution of its work in this area is felt strongly within school and beyond. However, while there are effective actions in place to promote pupils' engagement with a range of community and religious partners throughout the City, arrangements to monitor systematically and evaluate the full impact of this work are less well developed.

The school takes great care to ensure that all pupils are kept safe. It has adopted recommended good practice across all aspects of its work and has ensured that staff regularly receive high quality training in child protection matters. The governing body discharges its duties conscientiously, ensuring that only suitable adults work in the school. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and are regularly monitored and updated.

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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	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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It has many strengths, particularly in promoting children's personal development and their communication skills. For example, as a result of this good provision, one nursery child is now independently mark making, using new language skills to tell their own stories and clearly knows that print carries meaning. Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is usually at the very earliest stages of learning and development. From these starting points, children make good progress because they are well taught in a stimulating environment.

There is a dedicated team of skilled staff, who, as a result of good systems to observe and record how well children are progressing, are able to plan the next steps needed for each child's development effectively. As a result, lesson planning is carefully tailored using individual learning plans. Activities are systematically targeted on the important things children need to learn, as well as on the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. A wide variety of communication aids very effectively assist children's communication development, which, in turn, enables children to make independent learning choices. During adult-led activities questions are used well to challenge each child at a level appropriate to their individual ability. However, such high expectations are not always as evident in staff intervention during the activities which children choose for themselves. Leadership and management are good. Staff work together well and good attention is paid to children's welfare requirements, health and safety, and safeguarding. As a result, children gain in self-confidence, feel secure and are able to enjoy the activities on offer.

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The Early Years Foundation Stage leader manages the setting well and has a good knowledge of performance data, using an appropriate range of assessment schemes to track how well children are doing and to set realistic targets, which are, in the main, fully met.

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

Over half of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Those who did were overwhelmingly supportive of the schools' provision and the outcomes it achieves. Almost all responses were positive with a large majority expressing strong agreement with most aspects of the parental questionnaire. Safeguarding, support for parents and carers and the quality of teaching were all rated highly along with the extent to which children enjoy school. One typical comment was, 'The school has very efficient systems in place to keep parents informed so they can be fully involved. Care is outstanding and staff are extremely good at seeing our child as an individual with specific needs.' Very few returns presented opposing views and inspectors judge that relationships with parents and carers are overwhelmingly constructive and fully endorse the positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sunningdale 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 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 60 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	88	3	9	0	0	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	31	91	2	6	0	0	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	82	4	12	1	3	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	74	8	24	0	0	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	29	85	4	12	0	0	1	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	85	4	12	0	0	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	76	6	18	0	0	1	3
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)	22	65	8	24	0	0	1	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	76	7	21	0	0	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	56	14	41	0	0	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	68	9	26	0	0	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	23	68	10	29	0	0	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	79	6	18	0	0	1	3

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.



02 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sunningdale School, Sunderland, SR3 4HA

- You go to a good school that does many things really well. This helps you to learn lots of new skills and develop as happy and confident young people. We understand why you are so pleased to go there.
- You are very safe at this school because of the high quality care and support you get from both staff and other pupils.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants do a really good job helping you to make good progress in your lessons, but you also help yourselves by behaving well (most of the time!).
- The school provides you with lots of interesting and exciting things to do to help you to develop and make some of your own decisions, ready to move on to your next class or school.
- The headteacher and those who lead the school do a good job and work very hard to make sure you get the best education you can.

To help make your school even better, we want teachers to make sure they always match the difficulty of your work to just the right level for each of you, so that you have the best possible chance to do as well as you possibly can.

We both wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Farrow

Lead inspector

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