

Curnow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112086
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	337835
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Clegg
Headteacher	Bob Coburn
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, visiting professionals and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's procedures and policies for safeguarding children, records of pupils' progress and the 54 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- how well pupils are empowered to take responsibility for developing independence and making the right choices in leading healthy, safe lifestyles
- whether expectations are sufficiently high for all pupils, particularly those with the most complex needs
- how well embedded community cohesion is within the curriculum to enable pupils to have an awareness of life beyond their own community
- how well governors are being supported to develop their role in challenging the school.

Information about the school

Curnow Community School caters for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs. The needs of pupils include those with severe learning difficulties, multi needs (that is, those with profound and multiple learning difficulties) and those with social and communication difficulties, the majority of whom have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders.

Pupils come from a wide catchment area and many are from remote rural communities. The vast majority of pupils are from White British and White Cornish backgrounds and there are no pupils for whom English is a second language. There is a small percentage of pupils who are in public care. There are a very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and they are taught in a small class of Year 1 and Year 2 children.

The school has recently been awarded specialist status in communication and interaction.

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

Through the excellent leadership of the headteacher, Curnow School has developed, from a very low starting point four years ago, into a good school. It has a number of outstanding features, particularly in the care and welfare of pupils and its excellent links with a range of agencies. Leadership is very determined and the headteacher, supported well by his deputy, has brought about a range of positive changes to the school that are much appreciated by staff and parents. All share in its clear vision to recognise educational potential and nurture pupils' self-esteem.

Without doubt, a strength of the school is the excellent care, guidance and support that are provided to pupils. Staff know their pupils very well and as a result ensure that the support pupils receive is well targeted to meet their needs. The Curnow Individual Support Team (CIST) brings together a range of professionals who meet regularly with parents to ensure that the needs of their child are being addressed. Pupils' safety and well-being are given a very high priority and safeguarding procedures are excellent. All these factors result in a school in which pupils feel safe, and they clearly enjoy attending school. They talk very positively about their lives in school and are unanimous in how much they like their lessons and all the things they do. Pupils feel they are learning lots of things and this is reflected in their good achievement.

Through very good use of information about pupils' progress the school has developed a clear understanding about the progress each child makes and has ensured that there is excellent equality of opportunity for all pupils. The use of this information is becoming well embedded into teaching. As a result, teachers invariably ensure work is well matched to the different abilities so that pupils make good progress in their learning. The quality of teaching is good and has many strengths. Lessons are often fun and pupils learn new things through a range of experiences. The management of teaching assistants is generally good but this is not consistent across the school. On occasions teaching assistants are not sufficiently well guided in their role and are not always proactive in supporting learning.

For students in post-16 education, very strong leadership has brought about considerable improvements to accommodation and the curriculum. This, together with good teaching is enabling students to make good progress. For the very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, progress is good because they benefit from good teaching. However, because of a gap in leadership over the last year, leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good, as they have been in the past. While this has not had a significant impact on the outcomes for children, it has meant that at times the structure of parts of the day and planning of activities have not always been as well organised as they should be. The school is aware of this and the

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recent appointment of a new head of faculty has prompted a review of provision.

A new senior management team has been established and several of these staff are developing their skills in leadership. They are already having an impact in bringing about improvements. The good overall leadership and management of the school, together with a knowledgeable and supportive governing body, ensure that the school has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the role of teaching assistants so that they are clear about what they should do and so that they become more proactive in supporting pupils' learning.
- Ensure that for those children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the planning and structure of activities during the day is improved.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage class and their good achievements are built upon in a systematic way to ensure they make good progress. There is no evident difference in the overall progress of the different groups of pupils within the school. The school's good analysis of progress shows that in some subject areas pupils make outstanding progress. This is very evident in science and information and communication and technology, where the gains in learning over the last year have been excellent. In mathematics and personal, social and health education, progress is good. For the majority of pupils, progress in English is also good. The school has identified, though, that for those pupils with severe learning difficulties, progress in English is satisfactory rather than good. Quick action is already being taken to address this.

The enthusiasm and enjoyment that pupils have for school is very evident from their cheerful, smiling faces when they come in. They concentrate very hard in lessons, often for long periods of time, and are well aware of the routines of the day. Those with social and communication needs are keen to use pictorial symbols to identify what they will do next and make choices about activities. Those with more complex needs communicate their likes and dislikes and signal their responses to different stimuli. Pupils with severe learning difficulties are keen to be involved in their work, following instructions well in subjects such as mathematics and identifying words and letters when reading.

Pupils are very keen to talk about their involvement in sport. Power walking, football and physical education are things they say they enjoy immensely. They have a good awareness of staying healthy and many know what are healthy foods. The attraction of foods such as chocolate and chips, though, is often too great for some! Pupils do know that school dinners are healthy and lunchtimes are a very positive experience for them. Pupils talk confidently about who they would go to if they had problems and have an understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Behaviour in and around the school is excellent. Pupils are friendly and polite and, although there are incidents of challenging behaviour, these are linked to pupils' special educational needs rather than to any poor

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behaviour. Attendance for the vast majority of pupils is good. Where there are absences these are invariably a result of pupils' medical needs. The school council plays an important part in the school and is consulted about many aspects of school life. Pupils are involved well in the community and enjoy going out on visits to local shops and attractions. Older pupils and students are very proactive within the community and work closely with a nearby old people's home. There is good awareness of life in other countries and pupils have completed studies about different parts of the United Kingdom. The school recognises, though, that this needs to be extended further and that there is a need for pupils to develop a greater awareness of life in a multicultural society. Pupils are well prepared for life when they leave school and are provided with a good range of skills, both academic and social, that will hold them in good stead for the future.

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	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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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Lessons are often lively and pupils' enjoyment is evident when they are actively involved in their learning. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the throwing of large dice encouraged pupils to recognise the numbers and then to choose an activity that they had to repeat, matching the number they recognised. Staff were very exhausted after hopping and jumping so many times but the pupils loved it and made good progress in their learning. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils well to provide suitable stimulus and interest. They ensure that there are high expectations for all pupils and this was very evident in an outstanding science lesson for complex needs pupils. They were encouraged to follow and respond to lights from torches and a well-lit sphere. Pupils were moved around the class and encouraged to identify different sources of light that were displayed around the walls. A strength of this lesson was the way teaching assistants worked extremely well with individuals and ensured that all pupils were constantly encouraged to learn. This is not the case in all lessons and occasionally teaching assistants are not aware of their roles and how to ensure pupils gain from their experiences. In a small number of lessons this resulted in pupils being unsettled and on occasions sitting for some time without any support. Assessment systems are used well by staff and many use their knowledge and understanding to ensure work is matched to the individual.

The curriculum has been improved considerably since the last inspection and is now good. It provides a good range of experiences that enhance learning. The local and wider communities are used very well to support learning. Trips out of school are well planned to ensure that they are focused on learning and linked clearly to the curriculum. They also provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their independence and experience a range of different settings. The school is developing this aspect of the curriculum even further to enable more learning to take place off site. From Year 9 onwards pupils are actively involved in thinking about their destinations when they leave school. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is designed to support their aspirations and this is extended through into college. The accommodation remains a concern as it is still limited, particularly for outside play. However, there have been many improvements internally that have ensured that it is a bright and welcoming environment which celebrates pupils' achievements through a good range of displays.

Excellent training for staff ensures that they have a very clear understanding of the protocols of working with the pupils. Staff are considerate and respectful of pupils in dealing with their personal needs and are very aware of procedures for child protection and safeguarding. Considerable thought goes into setting targets for each individual pupil and these are measurable and challenging. The school is looking to review the targets more frequently to ensure pupils continue to make the progress they are capable of.

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

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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?

Excellent leadership at the highest level has enabled the school to make considerable improvements in a relatively short space of time. While beginning to have an impact on developing the school, new senior staff are still developing their skills and, as a result, leadership and management are good rather than outstanding. The vision of the headteacher, shared by all staff, is reflected in the ambitious plans for the future and their success in gaining specialist school status. Although this has only just been achieved, work has already started on ensuring that the communication needs of pupils and the strong links with parents and the community are being developed even further. The excellent links with other agencies are being extended and embedded in the work of the school. The school does all it can to involve parents and carers. They are given considerable information about their child's curriculum and activities during the day. Parents and carers are very positive about communication with the school. A challenge for staff, and one which is recognised by governors, is getting more parents and carers into school and more actively involved in their child's learning, although this aspect of the school's work is currently good. The excellent attention to safeguarding is reflected in the high quality training for staff and governors. Systems for the vetting of staff are thorough and robust.

Much has been done to develop community cohesion and planning is very detailed. There is good monitoring of the curriculum to ensure links with community are identified. The school has established very strong links within the local community, particularly with local schools and colleges. Governors too have been very proactive and have raised the profile of the school in many ways. The school has made a good start in developing links both nationally and globally, and staff's enthusiasm for extending this aspect of provision is a credit to the school.

Governors are very involved in the school and hold the senior team to account well. Self-evaluation processes are good and all staff and governors are involved in this. Leadership, with good support from the governors, has been very effective in improving teaching. Governors ensure that resources are used well and are very active fund raisers for the school. They have a secure understanding of data but are keen to develop their knowledge further in order to provide even more challenge. The many strengths of the school ensure that it provides good value for money.

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

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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	2
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	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

There is a good understanding of the range of needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and targets to support their learning are well thought through to enable them to achieve well. Children make particularly good progress in their personal and social skills and physical development. In other areas of the early learning goals, including communication and mathematical development, progress is good. Children clearly enjoy their time in the class and respond well to sessions such as those at the start of the day. They are keen to participate and interact well with staff. They identify the right symbol for the weather outside and the more able can identify their photograph amongst many others. Children listen well and respond to 'good morning'. Several use 'please' and 'thank you' without being reminded. Teaching maintains a good pace and this ensures that children generally stay on task and concentrate well. There is good teamwork amongst the staff and good attention is paid to health and safety and safeguarding. Planning for the curriculum is generally good, although aspects of knowledge and understanding and creative development are a focus for development, as children's progress, while satisfactory, is more variable in these areas.

There has been no clear leadership of this provision in the last year. The teacher has managed the day-to-day aspects but has had limited support in developing and evaluating the work she has done. The school has addressed this now and is aware of the need to review aspects of provision. While there is no evidence of negative impact on children's progress, some initiatives, particularly those involving work with other classes, have not been successful. These sessions are not always well structured and systems for ensuring that children develop their skills in a progressive way are not always secure.

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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	3

Sixth form

Very strong leadership has enabled this aspect of the school to move from barely satisfactory at the time of the last inspection to good. Although the sixth form is only recently established in its new setting, the well-planned curriculum is supporting learning well and enabling students to make good progress. Students are gaining credits from their courses which will contribute to college accreditation. They benefit from good teaching within the sixth form which supports their basic skills well. Staff match their teaching well to the needs of students because assessment is thorough and builds well on their skills. The very good links with local colleges are enabling students to access a range of courses based on their own aspirations and destinations. Students themselves are very positive about the changes. They like being part of a larger setting and are proud of the fact that they go to lunch with mainstream students and select and pay for their own food. They are given good opportunities to develop independence and like being treated as young adults. They carry out their roles and responsibilities when on work experience very sensibly and clearly enjoy the experiences. These factors, together with the good progress they make in their learning, prepare them very well for life when they leave school. Care, guidance and support are excellent. There is very good attention paid to safeguarding and the health and safety of the students. Risk assessment is effective and staff are vigilant in keeping students safe. Leadership has been effective in establishing an innovative and creative curriculum which, although at an early stage, is having a positive impact. A new leadership team has been established and is already bringing about further developments and developing provision 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

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Parents and carers are very positive about the school. There is considerable praise for the improvements that have been made; one parent commented that the headteacher 'has really made the school the best special school in the country'. Parents are full of praise for the staff and the work they do and comment on the increase confidence of their children. Their comments can be summarised by one parent who said, 'I find all aspects of this school excellent and fully appreciate all that's done for my child.'

The inspectors found no evidence to substantiate the one individual concern that was raised, although this was summarised and reported to the school without identifying any individual.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Curnow Community 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 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 99 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	72	14	26	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	39	72	14	26	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	44	81	10	19	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	39	72	10	19	4	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	41	76	12	22	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	63	17	31	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	65	18	33	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)	30	56	19	35	4	7	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	65	16	30	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	67	13	24	3	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	67	14	26	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	39	72	13	24	2	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	44	81	8	15	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 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.



8 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Curnow Community School, Redruth, Cornwall TR15 1LU

Thank you very much for being so kind and friendly when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing how hard you work. We agree with you that your school is a good school. You work very hard and do well in your learning. We were pleased that you like keeping healthy and doing lots of activities. Your teachers know you well and help you learn a lot of things. It was good to see how happy you are in school and that you feel safe. The school is very good at making sure you are well cared for. Dr Bob and all the staff work very hard to make sure you learn a lot and make sure all of you do well.

We have asked the school to make sure the things that the youngest children do are better organised. We have also asked that the school makes sure that the people who work with the teachers know just what they have to do help you.

You have a lot to be proud of about your school. You could help by trying to choose healthy foods whenever you can.

We wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall

Lead Inspector

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