

Sandgate School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112465
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	337937
Inspection dates	22–23 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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	57
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Shiach
Headteacher	Mr Tom Robson
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons and an assembly. All eight teachers were observed and discussions were held with members of the governing body, senior staff, teachers and pupils. Inspectors looked at the school's work, scrutinised policies, improvement plans and 44 parents' and carers questionnaires.

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

- how well assessments are used to help pupils make better progress
- the impact of the curriculum on promoting pupils' future economic well-being and developing their basic skills
- the effectiveness of the school in providing appropriate care, guidance and support for pupils
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers in improving the school.

Information about the school

Sandgate educates pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties. Many pupils also experience other learning barriers, such as extreme behaviours. Around 25% have autistic spectrum conditions. All have a statement of special educational needs. Pupils enter the school at any time in their school career and most continue to 19. Since the last inspection, Sandgate has become an extended school offering facilities to the local community, formed collaborative arrangements with other educational institutions and made plans for moving to a new site. Sandgate has the regionally representative cohort of pupils from minority ethnic groups of around 2%. Two pupils are looked after by the local authority and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly lower than the national average. Sandgate has the largest catchment area of any school in England and some pupils travel for more than an hour each day to attend. It has maintained Healthy Schools Status since 2007.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This superb school provides outstanding education and care for its pupils. Sandgate is held in very high esteem by the community. A typical comment that was offered by one partner was Sandgate is a shining jewel in the town'. Despite long journeys, pupils attend very willingly and they feel very safe here. They greatly enjoy school and contribute extremely well in lessons and in other ways. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and this makes it possible for them to participate in the outstanding range of health-promoting outdoor activities, such as climbing. They greatly improve their social skills and because they clearly understand what is expected of them many older pupils can take part in a wide range of high quality, off-site learning experiences. This adds further to their knowledge of different communities and they come to learn much more about other people.

Pupils arrive with overall attainment at very much below national averages, but all groups make outstanding progress compared with others in similar schools. Their achievements are remarkable. Consequently, they develop valuable communication skills that prepare them extremely well for the future and for moving on to the next stages of their lives. Older pupils gain qualifications and many learn to cope in the workplace. Teaching is outstanding and continues to improve under highly effective leadership. Nevertheless, in some lessons pupils require more structured questions to be posed by staff and they sometimes need more time to process information and form answers. Most teachers use very effective assessments to match tasks to pupils' ability accurately. However, the assessment system does not encourage frequent collections of data by managers and it is limited in its scope for analysis.

The curriculum is closely tailored to the individual needs of pupils and provides an outstanding range of choices in the upper school. Care, guidance and support for pupils are great strengths. Managers and governors are extremely rigorous in ensuring that all statutory obligations are met. Managers ensure that every part of this cramped site and its contents are used to great effect. For example, resources used to aid mobility and communication are expertly employed. The headteacher has clear vision for the school that is shared by the senior team and the great majority of the staff. Through regular review, the school knows its strengths and weaknesses very well because quality assurance is accurate and equitable. Thus the regular review of practice leads to action planning that is well informed and appropriate and the school maintains outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Provide better opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussions, by improving teachers' questioning skills through appropriate training.
 - By July 2011, enable pupils to make even better progress by improving systems for data handling to enable more regular reporting of classroom assessments.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils are keen to participate. They settle quickly into lessons and willingly take part in the activities planned for them. They behave very well. Most make outstanding gains in literacy and numeracy and become better communicators and this aids further high quality learning. Because of their difficulties, pupils' overall attainment remains much below the national average for all schools, but all groups make exceedingly good progress and all are included in learning. In the upper school, all succeed in gaining externally accredited qualifications. For several years the school has ensured that all leavers go on to further education, employment or training. This is a remarkable achievement for a school of this nature.

Pupils feel very safe in school. This is indicated through the responses provided by parents and carers and confirmed by the pupils themselves. Attendance is good and absence is almost always related to medical issues. Pupils eat very well and make sensible choices about their lunches. Regular exercise is part of the curriculum through outdoor education, but pupils also walk throughout the neighbourhood to explore the local geography. Pupils gain first-hand knowledge and understanding of wildlife and plants through working in the Sandgate's woodland school. Furthermore, they gain confidence in their ability to move over rough ground and surfaces. This adds to their self-esteem and encourages them to enjoy supporting each other in unfamiliar surroundings. Thus, pupils gain high quality social, moral and spiritual experiences and reduce their stress levels through being out of doors.

Pupils contribute very well to the life of the school. They support each other during lessons and at lunchtimes. The school council enthusiastically represents pupils' views. Delegates are rightly proud of the impact the council has had and they recently organised an event for leavers. All pupils undertake trips that support their learning and development. Almost all go on residential visits that provide opportunities for interaction with other communities. The school has joined the Comenius project and pupils therefore learn about other European countries and welcome visitors into school from abroad.

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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
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	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is mostly outstanding. This is because teachers know pupils very well and plan tasks to match their interests and abilities. Almost all lessons are planned very thoroughly, and teachers set excellent learning targets for pupils that help them to demonstrate their outstanding progress in very small steps. In the best lessons, classroom assistants are carefully directed to guide and assist pupils, and this they do with great skill and care. Pupils form close working relationships with the adults who care for them and greatly benefit from this highly effective support.

Until the end of Key Stage 4, all pupils follow courses linked to the National Curriculum and exciting new developments are underway to further enhance further the range of choices in the upper school. New technologies are trialled and introduced to enhance pupils' communication and mobility needs. Many valuable nurturing activities are evident throughout the school day. These reinforce aspects of personal, social and health education, and encourage pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour. Older pupils gain confidence from work-related learning opportunities and work experience, and when necessary, Sandgate provides support to enable this to happen. Thus pupils develop skills that help them to move on to the next stages of their lives. The extended school operates every week of the year offering services to young people including those who do not attend Sandgate.

Excellent relationships encourage pupils to take any concerns to those adults whom they trust. Staff work closely with each other and with other professionals to ensure that pupils spend as much time as possible in school and in lessons. Staff provide outstanding care and support across all areas of the school. For example, they welcome

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pupils and ensure that they are ready to start the day and they remain alert to individual pupils' medical and other needs. Staff help pupils to feel positive about Sandgate when that might not have been the case in other educational settings. Pupils and their families receive excellent guidance and advice about transitional arrangements for moving on to the next stages of their lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection the headteacher and senior team have greatly improved the quality of learning by ensuring that teachers use assessments more frequently and more effectively. They have instigated new curricular pathways designed to provide opportunities for all to learn and gain accreditations. Managers very skilfully appraise the work of the school to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to progress and that none are discriminated against. The governing body is enthusiastic and supportive. Recent changes in its membership have produced a good mix of talents. Consequently, governors are highly effective in supporting managers and checking very rigorously on the work of the school. Governors regularly visit and some play an active part as volunteers to specific classes. Safeguarding practices are outstanding because policies and procedures are exemplary. Designated safeguarding staff and governors have completed training to the statutory requirement and beyond, and all aspects of safeguarding are undertaken with great skill and awareness.

Sandgate places great importance on its contributions to the community. The federations that have been established greatly benefit all pupils from these educational establishments. Sandgate pupils are encouraged, as well they are able, to maintain good relations with others from different backgrounds. Contacts are maintained with organisations, such as the police, to help pupils to know more about public services. Parents and carers engage very well indeed with the school and are extremely well informed about the education and care their children experience. Staff make very good use of resources including new technologies, communication aids and mobility devices to help pupils to learn. Sandgate, therefore, provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Through their responses, children indicate as well as they can that they feel safe and are confident in this very well structured environment. Staff go to extreme lengths to help children to settle and share experiences with others. For example, the key worker for one child with extreme visual and hearing impairments wears the same perfume when the child is present in the hope that he will come to recognise this stimulus as being familiar. Children develop communication skills within their capabilities so that they can become tolerant of other people and recognise their presence.

Very thorough planning occurs to ensure maximum possible coverage of the Early Years and Foundations Stage curriculum. The leader skilfully employs a range of assessment strategies that help staff to gauge progress and plan learning experiences. The unit is very well resourced and spacious enough to ensure that needs are met for all children. However, future improvements are being considered, such as changing the surfaces in the play area so that they are undulating and bumpy, so that children can experience these surfaces through the wheels of their mobility devices. The dedicated team is very well organised and directed. Highly effective leadership indicates a very good capacity for further improvement.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

By continuing the excellent work of the lower school, students in the post-16 setting make rapid progress. Their achievements, relative to their starting points, are outstanding. They make decisions and think for themselves. Students get on well together. Most develop skills for future independent living and a minority are already taking responsibility for their own learning. Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe because they learn about health and safety in the workplace. Staff accurately assess the needs of students and use individual targets to challenge them. Teachers are rigorous in their monitoring of progress and adept at modifying teaching methods when learning difficulties arise.

Students' needs are met through the use of personalised programmes so that, for example, the curriculum is individually designed and enrichment activities tailored to their interests. Excellent partnership arrangements with other institutions and agencies provide a wide range of opportunities to join in with vocational and other courses. As a result, all move on to placements beyond school. Care, guidance and support for all, including those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable, are of the best quality. Managers have high expectations of students and are effective in reducing any barriers to their progress caused by their learning difficulties.

Vision and ambition is shared by the staff and the common sense of purpose encourages all to provide the very best opportunities for students. Parents and carers are kept well informed about their children's progress and are consulted on a regular basis to ensure that support is always appropriate. Health and safety of students throughout their great range of experiences is paramount, for example through the extensive use of risk assessments. Consequently they feel secure and well cared for.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were returned from 44 parents and carers. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the school. For example, one written comment went as far as to say 'Sandgate School, its teachers, staff and pupils are an excellent example of how special schools should work'

A very few parents and carers expressed concern about how well informed the school keeps them about the progress and welfare of their children. While inspectors agree that there is always more that can be done to liaise with parents and carers, the inspection evidence did not support this view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sandgate 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 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 57 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	66	14	32	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	77	9	20	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	73	9	20	3	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	59	15	34	1	2	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	30	68	13	30	0	0	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	61	14	32	2	5	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	70	13	30	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)	29	66	12	27	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	68	10	23	1	2	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	61	13	30	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	52	18	41	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	37	84	6	14	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	75	9	20	1	2	1	2

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.



24 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sandgate School, Kendal, LA9 6JG

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you on the playground, at lunch and in your classes. I learned a lot about the Angel of the North from talking with some of you after your visit.

Sandgate is a superb school and the adults look after you very well indeed. We believe that you feel very safe and secure at school and appreciate the excellent relationships that you develop with each other and with staff. Your contributions are outstanding because you behave very well and try hard to adopt healthy lifestyles. Your attendance is good and you share your learning with others extremely well, both inside school and in other places.

Your teachers produce outstanding lessons with some marvellous activities. The headteacher, other senior leaders and the governors, all work hard to give you the best quality education. You have many exciting opportunities outside of school and Sandgate communicates very well with your parents and carers.

The inspectors feel that some improvements could still be made. For example, we would like the staff to have further training in questioning pupils in class, so that you have more and better opportunities to contribute to discussions. Also, we believe that the school could use assessment information better and more regularly. This would help you to make even more progress in your lessons.

We wish you all the best for the future and once again thank you for your help and interest in the inspection.

Yours sincerely,

Terry McKenzie

Lead Inspector

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