

The Cedar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116622
Local Authority	
Inspection number	338843
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Scott HMI

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	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Thomas
Headteacher	Jonathan Howells
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspection team observed 11 lessons and held meetings with staff, groups of students and with governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation including school policies, student tracking information and the 22 parental questionnaires received.

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

- the extent to which the school ensures personalised opportunities and experiences
- how well students make progress and are prepared for life beyond the school
- the extent to which technologies impact on outcomes for students.

Information about the school

The Cedar School is a small special school primarily for students who need additional physical care. The range of abilities is extremely wide and includes students with physical and sensory difficulties, and moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. All students have statements of special educational needs or are undergoing assessment for this. There are fewer students than found nationally who are of minority ethnic heritage or whose first language is not or believed not to be English. Students eligible for free school meals make up about a quarter of all students.

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

The Cedar School is very successful in providing exceptional care and learning opportunities for all students in the school. The commitment and professional approach by all staff has ensured that students make good progress overall with many students making outstanding progress in their learning.

There is a very strong sense of community in the school and an effective team of staff works diligently to ensure that the needs of students are at the heart of all decision making. Leaders, teachers, classroom support assistants, governors, support staff, volunteers and professionals from a wide range of supporting agencies, including health professionals, coordinate their work to great effect in ensuring students feel safe and have appropriate and high-quality opportunities for learning.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding throughout because of the thorough planning and attention to detail in tracking precisely the progress students are making. The needs of learners are met extremely well as a great deal of effort is committed to ensuring the transition to school life is smooth and involves parents appropriately.

Teachers and classroom support assistants work well together to ensure good teaching overall and this is improving because of the professional skills and passion for delivering the best for students who have ever-changing needs. The school is analytical and questions conventions to develop practice further. It recognises that greater precision in tracking and target setting will drive improvements further.

Governors' commitment to and passion for school improvement is strong. Governors are supportive of the school and give a great deal of time to enhance life for students. Policies and practice are reviewed and governors are clear about the need to evaluate the work of the school more systematically. The school knows its strengths well and has clear priorities for development. A good capacity for sustained improvement has been demonstrated in the well-established track record of development.

The Cedar School is a forward-looking school that is passionate about developing students' independence. Students told inspectors how they enjoy school life and how they are challenged to do their best.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the teaching practice further to ensure the outstanding practice is used as a model for all lessons ' particularly ensuring effective use of time and greater precision of target setting and tracking of progress.
- Strengthen governance further with a more systematic evaluation of the school's

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work to drive improvement, particularly analysis of the impact of key policies on learners.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students throughout the school told the inspection team how much they enjoy life at The Cedar School. It is evident in all of the activities how safe students feel in the care of the school. Students' starting points are varied and wide-ranging in both cognitive and physical abilities. There are significant differences between the progress made by individuals but there are no issues relating to any group of students within the school. Students are known well by the staff in the school and this, along with the positive attitudes of students, is a major factor in ensuring the progress students make is good overall. Many students make outstanding progress but this is not always clearly defined or tracked by the school.

Behaviour in the school is outstanding and students share the school's caring ethos, often demonstrating empathy and consideration for staff and fellow students. Students are able to demonstrate appropriate levels of understanding about healthy lifestyles and increasingly some take on their own personal care needs with clear understanding of fitness, diet and medical needs.

The school has a clear approach to ensuring that, where appropriate, students successfully complete externally accredited courses, including GCSEs and entry-level certificates. The school develops students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) well but the skill levels remain low. The school does strive to develop independence for each individual appropriate to their abilities. Opportunities to undertake courses in other local schools also help students to develop wider skills for later life. The increasingly complex profile of students' needs has had an impact on the attendance overall. Some students require extended periods of absence for professional support such as medical interventions. Considering this, attendance still remains low overall. The school recognises that this absence impedes overall progress and works hard to minimise it.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Opportunities to study and to experience other cultures such as Chinese New Year are enjoyed by students through, for example, visits to a local restaurant and engaging assemblies.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	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	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There is a common focus on, and success in, securing good teaching. There is a wide range of good practice in the school. Staff are well trained and there is a vast depth and breadth of knowledge to draw upon within the team. The personal interactions between students and all adults demonstrate the respect and passion for learning that is part of the school's ethos. Teachers use a range of tracking and progress information to good effect in analysing their own practice. The extent to which targets are met is discussed within the school and is effective in assessing performance but does not always identify high performance or promote even greater progress.

Lessons are clearly planned with broad learning outcomes defined. The support assistants and teachers work very closely together to ensure all students have a positive experience. Opportunities for developing independence within each student's capabilities are taken. Students are treated with respect and personal needs are handled during lessons with sensitivity and dignity. Support assistants are highly proactive and develop the key ideas with skill and often lead elements within lessons. Technologies are used very effectively across the school to improve the progress and access for students. Voice output communication aids, for example, were used effectively in a 'Speech Bubbles' lesson, developing fluency in communication with care, encouragement, sensitivity and a splash of humour. The support assistants demonstrated a highly perceptive understanding of the individual needs of all students taking part, while allowing students to engage in the cross-table banter of classrooms that was a major objective of the lesson. There were brief periods in some lessons which were not as productive because students spent too long waiting for the next opportunity to contribute, for example when

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there was a rigid turn-taking process.

The curriculum is relevant and develops appropriately the skills and abilities of all students. It is highly tailored to individuals and the school meets the needs of individuals extremely well. Development of independent skills and life skills has a high priority. All staff are skilled in the understanding of when and when not to intervene, either directly or with the use of specialist equipment or technologies. The school is developing the curriculum further to enhance experiences, for example in the workplace and with other partner schools. The school provides a limited range of opportunities for students with extended absence and for students to take part in after-school activities. Transportation constraints influence this.

The care of students in The Cedar School is exceptional. The team of staff work diligently to ensure that the care and support of students is a key priority. The high level of continuous training and collaboration between the staff ensures students enjoy dignity and independence within their individual limits. Effective communication within the school supports the well-being of students and encourages progress regardless of the challenges faced by individuals.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team has developed a focused strategy for improvement, with the students being central to all decisions. Staff feel valued and morale is high. Adults in the school are proud to be a part of the school and understand how they can contribute to developments. They are well supported and clear about how they can improve their own practice. Self-evaluation is good and the school prioritises developments well.

Developments are well planned with a high level of consultation. This is demonstrated by the work that has been undertaken to establish a true student voice. Although this is at an early stage, an energy and passion are evident throughout the school to empower students.

The school has outstanding partnership arrangements with a wide range of professionals and with other organisations. The support for the complex needs of students is coordinated and integrates well to ensure the focus of learning is maintained.

Governors are regularly involved in school life and hold the school to account. They speak to staff and students but do not systematically assess the impact of the school's work. Safeguarding procedures are good and well understood and meet government

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regulations. The school promotes equality and is highly inclusive with a great deal of effort made by all to develop independence and it is effective in eliminating discrimination. The school promotes community cohesion through a range of activities and has been successful in creating a highly cohesive community within the school. Cohesion beyond the school boundaries is more limited but the school has given this aspect appropriate priority.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	3
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children learn very well in the Early Years setting because they are extremely well cared for and have individualised learning programmes which are matched very well to their needs. Excellent use is made of the outdoor area to develop learning and an understanding of the environment. Constant high-quality interactions assist in the development of language and opportunities to develop skills independently. Adults are excellent role models for children. Children are valued, as are their opinions, and are encouraged to make choices. The very strong relationships enhance social development. Parents are involved from an early stage in transition into the school and the fact that key workers know children very well makes the progression into Key Stage 1 seamless. The leadership is outstanding, with a drive to keep improving the provision using best practice as children move on. Accurate and precise assessments are undertaken and are used well to plan learning experiences.

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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

Views of parents and carers

All parents who responded to the questionnaire were happy with their child's overall experience at the school. A very large majority of parents expressed positive views about all aspects in the questionnaire. All parents said the school is well led, that their child enjoys school and they feel they are well informed about the progress their child makes. Typical comments from parents highlighted the way the school has helped them in understanding the many things their children are able to succeed in.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Cedar 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 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	17	77	5	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	77	4	18	1	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	55	10	45	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	45	9	41	1	5	2	9
The teaching is good at this school	15	68	5	23	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	64	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	64	7	32	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)	12	55	6	27	2	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	68	5	23	1	5	1	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	59	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	59	8	36	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	16	73	6	27	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	68	7	32	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

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

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

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

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

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



12 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cedar School, Southampton, SO16 0XN

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school and for the help you gave us during the inspection.

The staff at the school all work very well together and are very skilled and committed to ensuring you enjoy learning and achieve a great deal in school. You told us how you enjoy school and it was good to see how well you all cooperate and ensure you have a positive learning community.

We think you make good progress in your studies and this is helped by the excellent care, support and guidance you receive. The school pushes you hard and makes sure that you can be as independent as possible. You respond to this challenge well and contribute to lessons well even when you find communications difficult.

It was good to see how well you use the range of technologies and we were most impressed by how you use equipment such as the voice output communication aids to develop independence.

Your teachers and support staff provide an outstanding curriculum and are eager to improve things further in lessons by ensuring time is always used well and that targets are used more to promote progress.

I hope you will continue to work alongside teachers and other adults in the school to achieve even more.

I wish you well in all that you do.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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