

# Sir Charles Parsons School and Science College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131987
<b>Local Authority</b>	Newcastle Upon Tyne
<b>Inspection number</b>	341266
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 June 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Farrow

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Lindsay Booth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Nick Sharing
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Westbourne Avenue Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tyne and Wear NE6 4ED
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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 20 lessons and saw 19 teachers, and meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at examples of students' work, the school's policies, minutes of meetings of the governing body, external reports, students' files and progress records and 54 responses to the parents' and carers' questionnaires.

- how well lessons are matched to the individual needs of students
- whether students' individual learning targets are sufficiently ambitious in relation to their ability, needs and interests
- how well leaders and managers use information about students' performance to drive and secure further improvement.

## Information about the school

Sir Charles Parsons School is a larger-than-average community special school for students aged 11 to 19 years with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some students have additional sensory and physical disabilities and others present challenging behaviours. The school serves the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. Around half the students currently on roll are known to be eligible for free school meals and approximately 15% of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. A small number of students are looked after children. The school secured specialist science college status in 2007 shortly after its last inspection and more recently has become an accredited 'solutions orientated school'. It is currently housed in an adapted former secondary school building, but is due to relocate in 2011 into new, purpose-built premises currently under construction on the same site.

**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

Sir Charles Parsons School and Science College is an outstanding school. It lives up to its aim of making the school somewhere where all students 'enjoy, learn and achieve' extremely well. Almost all parents and carers report the very positive impact the school has on their children's learning and personal development and they all agree the school is preparing their children well for the next stage of their education or training. One parent's comment was typical of many; 'My child really enjoys going to school; even in the holidays he asks if he can go to school!' The inspection findings mirror these sentiments without reservation.

Students of all ages and with a wide range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported, cared for and challenged exceptionally well. Since its last inspection, the school has continued to develop a philosophy of 'enquiry-based learning' appropriate to a specialist science college. Students are systematically encouraged to become active thinkers when facing new experiences, to consider options and make and express their informed choices. Consequently, students thrive and become fully contributing members of this vibrant, ambitious and cohesive school community. Behaviour in and around school is excellent and makes a vitally important contribution to students' learning and progress in lessons.

The school has also developed an exceptionally strong and tangible sense of common purpose; striving to raise achievement for all students by continual improvements within teaching, sharing existing expertise among staff and taking account of the most current research into effective learning. The school's focus on continually and systematically improving teaching is an area of outstanding practice.

Almost all students achieve extremely well because teachers and teaching assistants have a very secure knowledge and understanding of their individual needs. Staff generally use day-to-day assessment very effectively to match the challenge in students' work to the next steps required in their learning. However, they are not complacent and continue to work hard to ensure that students' learning and progress continues to improve. The school's leaders make effective use of data on students' progress but recognise that ensuring all staff apply assessment criteria totally consistently remains a minor area for improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are justifiably proud of their school and use critically-reflective self-evaluation procedures with determination and rigour to drive and secure the small steps of improvement needed to maintain and continue to improve the school's high-quality provision. They have systematically maintained and built on previously outstanding performance in all areas and have an outstanding capacity to

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improve.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by ensuring that teachers and other adults share a precise knowledge and understanding of each 'step' of learning for students and are consistent in what they then do to build on these.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**1**

Students make consistently good and often exceptional progress in their lessons when measured against their individual starting points, which are low in relation to age-related expectations. Students who speak English as an additional language thrive in equal measure to all other students and clearly benefit from learning in an environment rich in alternative modes of communication, such as signing. All students demonstrate excellent concentration and show great tenacity when tackling new and demanding tasks across a wide range of subjects. For example, in one outstanding Year 8 English lesson, a group of boys persevered with dogged determination, using their speaking and listening and their reading skills to the limits of their ability, to build a shared understanding of how to play an unfamiliar board game 'fairly'. At the same time, they also had the confidence and self-esteem to have fun! In almost all lessons students of differing abilities showed equally impressive determination to work hard and achieve their individual learning targets, which are reviewed systematically at the start and conclusion of every lesson. Consequently, progress is nearly always at least good and often better than might be expected when compared with other students with similar special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Students take great pride in their work and derive obvious pleasure and enjoyment from their successes. They are very enthusiastic when talking about almost all aspects of life and work in school; these positive attitudes underpin their outstanding achievement and behaviour in lessons. The vast majority of students show very considerate behaviour towards each other and join in eagerly, with adults, to recognise and celebrate each other's successes. This helps reinforce a very positive and inclusive focus on each student's individual learning achievements and encourages less confident individuals and those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to become fully and actively involved learners. Occasionally, individual students demonstrate sudden, noisy emotional outbursts that can lead to instances of challenging behaviour. Confident and experienced staff, however, intervene quickly and usually help students calm down, resume their work and continue to make good progress.

Students say they feel safe at school. Parents' and carers' responses to questionnaires strongly verify this view. Students show a clear sense of right and wrong and understand the importance and need to follow school rules. They also have a good understanding of the factors that can lead to a healthy lifestyle and speak knowledgeably about the importance of a balanced diet and the need for regular exercise, although a few do not always act on this knowledge all the time. Students

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make outstanding contributions to their own and partner school communities. They participate eagerly in fundraising activities and performances at a local and national level and willingly undertake additional responsibilities within or outside of school. For example, students have recently entertained delegates at a national conference with their Samba drumming, and students, staff, and parents and carers have just undertaken a sponsored walk to raise money to purchase a number of specially adapted mobility cycles for use in school. Attendance is in line with the national average for secondary schools despite the occasional absence of a few students with serious medical conditions. The school fosters students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well and this, along with concerted efforts to promote their independence, is helping develop a strong student 'voice' in the school that has a very positive impact on many aspects of its work and development.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

<sup>1</sup> 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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Teachers and teaching assistants hold suitably ambitious expectations of all students. They are highly effective in supporting each student to become a more independent communicator and thinker, able to work cooperatively and with increasing success as part of a small group or class. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge creatively to inspire and motivate students, including those with the most significant learning needs, to make the best possible progress in each subject. The consistent use of precise, purposeful classroom talk, signing or sensory experiences, based around students' individual learning targets, is another major strength that means that time in lessons is always used productively. It also means that students who speak English as an additional language are effectively supported to be fully included in all lessons. Careful assessment, observation and skilful questioning help ensure that students' learning proceeds successfully towards their intended learning outcomes. The school's self-evaluation has identified a need to continue to refine its approaches to judging the level at which individual students are working in school and with its external partners, and inspectors agree that this need exists. This refinement is needed to help provide an even more reliable basis from which to plan and demonstrate students' progress. Staff share a strong commitment to continual improvement, for example when sharing knowledge and expertise as members of a 'solution orientated school' or striving to integrate recent research findings into their everyday practice. Staff and students use information and communication technology routinely in lessons, making excellent use of switches, computers and interactive whiteboards in their day-to-day work to extend or enhance learning.

The school's curriculum provides excellent opportunities to support high-quality learning and wider personal development and well-being. While it follows a secondary subject model delivered mainly by subject specialists, it is suitably dynamic and personalised to be finely matched to the changing needs of diverse individuals and groups. For example, personalised and flexible 'pathways' enable individual students with more complex behavioural needs to remain fully engaged in their learning programmes. Since the last inspection the school has continued to build on historic strengths of 'scientific enquiry' with the science specialism now having a demonstrable impact on improving teaching, learning and achievement throughout the school and in its partner schools. Extremely well-targeted and individualised support for all students enables them to take full advantage of the rich and diverse opportunities provided by the school. This is evident in all aspects of the school's work on site, with its partner schools and agencies and with students' families.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

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## How effective are leadership and management?

The school's leaders and staff share highly ambitious aspirations on behalf of the school and are equally determined to drive through and secure nothing less than excellence for students. Thus they share a common sense of purpose and speak and act with one coherent voice. Senior leaders are experienced reflective practitioners who oversee rigorous self-evaluation arrangements in an uncompromisingly self-critical manner. This means they have an extremely accurate and well-evidenced view of the school's strengths and the few areas it still needs to improve. Subject leaders share these characteristics, and are continuing to drive up the quality of teaching and learning in their departments still further.

The governing body makes a powerful and effective contribution to establishing the school's strategic improvement priorities. Governors contribute a wide range of relevant expertise to their role and hold the school staff to account whenever necessary. Governors demonstrate confident, insightful, first-hand knowledge of the school's work and conscientiously discharge their statutory duties. Consequently, they have developed a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues and make certain the school adopts a rational, measured and very effective approach to ensuring the safety of students and staff at all times.

A strong and explicit commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity lies at the heart of the school's values and underpins its approach to all aspects of its provision. Outcomes are meticulously monitored to ensure that they are equally positive for different groups of students and, if they are not, action is taken promptly to ensure any unevenness is reduced rapidly. The school is a very cohesive community where students from diverse religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds get along particularly well together. The contribution of its work in this area is felt strongly in school. There are effective arrangements in place to promote engagement with a range of community groups beyond the school's immediate community, although this engagement is not yet as strong as it might be. The school is well on its way to improving this aspect of community cohesion and is evaluating already how to strengthen the provision further.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>



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<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Sixth form

In the sixth form students make good progress in relation to an appropriate range of externally accredited courses. The school's rigorous self-evaluation had identified a recent decline in the quality of students' learning following the introduction of new courses. These had initially led to the curriculum becoming too focused on accreditation rather than students' individual needs. This has been effectively addressed and inspection findings confirm that learning outcomes in the sixth form are quickly returning to the same levels as found elsewhere in the school. Teachers deliver consistently good lessons in the sixth form and use assessment effectively to enable students to achieve the high-quality learning outcomes of which they are capable. Programmes and activities follow on seamlessly from those in Year 11 and are now well matched to students' individual needs. The same outstanding care, guidance and support are as evident in the sixth form as in the main school. This helps ensure that students are well prepared for transition to the next phase of their education or training beyond school, and to adjust to these quickly and successfully. The success of the sixth form is underpinned by the ambition and determination of its leaders. They are quick to tackle emerging areas of weakness, as in the example above, because they are driven by a fervent commitment to achieve outstanding achievement for students.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
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	1

## Views of parents and carers

A high proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Those who did were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's provision and the outcomes it achieves. Almost all responses were positive with most expressing strong agreement with almost every aspect of the questionnaire. Safeguarding, learning and progress and the quality

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of teaching were all rated particularly highly along with the extent to which children enjoy school. One typical comment said, 'We feel very strongly that this is the very best school for our daughter, it is excellent and will be even better once [everyone moves] into the new school'. A very small number of returns disagreed with some of these views, but even these were generally positive. The inspectors judged that relationships with parents and carers were tremendously constructive, and fully endorsed the positive views.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sir Charles Parsons School and Science College 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 134 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	70	16	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	80	11	20	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	40	74	14	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	69	17	31	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	40	74	14	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	63	18	33	1	2	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	63	18	33	2	4	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)	34	63	19	35	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	74	13	24	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	70	15	28	0	0	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	78	11	20	0	0	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	40	74	13	24	0	0	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	80	10	19	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

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

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

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



14 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir Charles Parsons School and Science College,  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 4ED

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave my colleague and me when we came to inspect your school, especially those of you who spent time talking to us about your school.

This is what we found out.

- Your school gives you an excellent education that helps you to learn well and develop as confident young people; we understand why you are so proud to go there.
- You also say you feel very safe and enjoy going to school because of the high-quality care, guidance and support you get both from staff and other students.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants do an excellent job helping you to make good and often exceptional progress in your lessons, but you also help yourselves by behaving very well.
- The school provides you with an extremely good range of interesting and exciting learning opportunities which help you develop as more independent thinkers and learners, ready to move on to the next stage of education or training.
- The headteacher and those who lead the school do an excellent job and work very hard to make sure you get the best education you can.

We have asked the school to make sure that staff always match the difficulty of your work to just the right level for each of you, so that you always do as well as you possibly can. You can help by continuing to work hard.

We both wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Farrow

Lead Inspector

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