

The Centre School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135695
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	341688
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Harradine
Headteacher	Mr Tony Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Cottenham Cambridgeshire
Telephone number	01954 288944
Fax number	01954 288949
Email address	office@CVCweb.net

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Inspection number	341688

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2009

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons and held meetings with a governor, staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school policies, records, reports of external evaluations of the school's work, students' work and four parental questionnaires.

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

- whether students are challenged by their work and make progress in line with their capabilities
- the extent to which the curriculum meets requirements and students' needs
- how effective leadership and management are in giving the school clear direction, the capacity for improvement and systemic organisation.

Information about the school

The Centre School is a new school which opened in November 2008 and this is its first inspection. It is federated with Cottenham Village College and is situated on its campus. The Centre School has grown from a long established college unit for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The headteacher of the college has overall responsibility for both institutions. The school and college share a governing body. A college deputy headteacher is in day-to-day charge of the school. The school has several demountable buildings for classrooms; these are adjacent to a youth centre building used by the school's students for social and recreational purposes. Students spend a significant proportion of each day on activities away from the college campus. Currently, they have access to a small number of the college's educational resources.

Each student has a statement of special educational needs that identifies behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as their main needs. Almost all students are White British and many travel long distances from home to school.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

This new school has not had a successful beginning because leaders have not had a clear enough vision to set high expectations and follow these through to ensure students make progress and achieve. As a result, vital areas of the school's work have not flourished. Teaching, assessment, the curriculum and the management of students' behaviour have not been securely established. Leaders lack sufficient special school expertise to set clear direction for each of these areas of provision and, therefore, development and effectiveness are hindered. Governors are ineffective in holding the school to account. Leaders are also hampered by the lack of time and resources to enable them to get a good grasp of the issues facing the school. Rigorous, extensive self-evaluation has been held back. Monitoring and evaluation have so far been carried out by people other than those who work at the school. While reports, the earliest of which dates back almost a year, have highlighted the weaknesses in provision, the school's actions to remedy these have been too slow in bringing improvements. Sharply focused development planning is barely in place. Consequently, the capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate. The school's contribution to promoting community cohesion is unsatisfactory.

Students' enjoyment, achievement and equality of opportunity are inadequate because they are not taught effectively enough. The curriculum limits student opportunities to make progress and the inconsistent management of their behaviour means attitudes to learning are often unhelpful. Students' preparation for future economic well-being is unsatisfactory; too few substantial opportunities are provided for students to make progress in literacy and numeracy. However, some gain qualifications before they leave and most choose a positive pathway to employment. It is not possible to gauge this achievement in relation to each student's potential because too little is known of their attainment when they start and their progress is not tracked systematically. This also makes accurate planning of lessons difficult, in particular matching work to each student's capabilities. The quality of students' work highlights the frequent lack of appropriate challenge. Students who need extra help with literacy and numeracy remain unidentified and unsupported.

Individual education planning and behaviour plans are not effective. Students' targets, which depend on assessment, are not sharply focused. The school is moving in the right

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

direction in relation to its contacts with parents, for example including them in agreeing plans and providing them with regular written reports. However, reports to parents are limited because little accurate detail can be given on their children's progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and strengthen learning and progress by:
 - implementing effective means of measuring students' attainment on entry
 - tracking students' progress over time and measuring their outcomes
 - setting challenging targets for the school and students.
 - Manage students' behaviour in the classroom in order that they can learn effectively by:
 - setting out clear expectations for staff and students
 - ensuring a clearly articulated approach to managing behaviour is applied consistently by all staff
 - writing and implementing effective behaviour plans for all students.
 - Strengthen lessons and eliminate inadequate teaching by:
 - developing and implementing a systematic and rigorous assessment of learning
 - ensuring all lessons are planned in the light of assessment information
 - making learning objectives clear and sharing them effectively with students.
 - Increase equality of opportunity by:
 - planning a broad and balanced curriculum which makes adequate provision for literacy and numeracy
 - providing the extra help needed by students who have more difficulty than most with learning in literacy and numeracy
 - promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
 - Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - clarifying a vision, developing clear aims and setting high expectations for the school, the staff and students
 - creating an effective senior leadership structure, leadership throughout the school and an adequate administration system
 - establishing comprehensive, rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work
 - ensuring governors challenge and hold the school to account for the effectiveness of its provision and students' outcomes.

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

Of those students who left school in 2009, seven out of fourteen gained one or more of the following qualifications: foundation learning tier levels in literacy and numeracy, entry level certificates and A* - G passes in GCSE English. The remainder left with none of these, although some students gained awards for single units of study. The majority found places on further education courses, training or employment. From these results and the scrutiny of current students' coursework, it is not possible to determine achievement as so little is known about each student's capabilities. It is not clear from their work that students are dealing with challenging tasks. In lessons, because assessment processes are not functioning effectively, the challenge in students' work is much too variable, not well matched to their capabilities and often does not truly stretch them. There was no significant difference seen in the performance of boys and girls. Students displaying obvious difficulties in literacy and numeracy were given no support for these and made no progress in overcoming their difficulties.

As relationships between students and staff are reasonably secure and as there is close supervision, students are safe. Their behaviour is inadequate because of frequent low level distraction and disruption during lessons held in school. The level of persistent absence and of temporary exclusions is high. As provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has not been thought out systematically, these aspects of personal development are unsatisfactory. The attention to healthy living and taking care of oneself contribute to a satisfactory understanding of a healthy lifestyle. However, students do not contribute significantly in school or the community as opportunities are limited; for example, there is no school council.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	4

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

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	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4 4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4

How effective is the provision?

Too many lessons are inadequate. Teaching often lacks clear learning objectives and very little teaching is effective in explaining to students what they need to learn. The planning of lessons is weakened by the absence of assessment information. There is no firm rationale underpinning work and activities, or their level of challenge. This was evident in the lessons seen in Key Stage 3 and less so in Key Stage 4. Here, although still not adequate, accredited courses offer some structure and direction. Students' work is not marked thoroughly and their learning is not systematic enough for them to make the progress that they should. Some teaching is lively and engaging, particularly in mathematics. The management of students' behaviour is not sufficiently assured. Their attention, concentration and effort suffer as a result.

Curriculum aims and the rationale for its breadth and balance are unclear. The school has no convincing explanation of why students spend the best part of each day on a wide range of activities out of school; these are either vocationally or leisure based. It is not clear what their contribution to learning and progress is, even though some benefits, to personal development in particular, may be surmised. Too little time is given to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills, especially at Key Stage 3 where curriculum planning is embryonic. Science is provided in the college for Key Stage 3 students only and experimental work is planned effectively. Overall, there is too little formal taught time. A significant amount of this, to provide for basic skills, has minimal impact on progress as its planning is weak.

An appropriate approach to behaviour management and its effective implementation is not in place. Strategies to manage behaviour are inconsistent. The individual behaviour plans examined were not well written as targets, and the means to achieve them, were vague. Policies and procedures to safeguard students are satisfactory and the school has secured satisfactory links with local safeguarding and other agencies such as the careers advisory service. The provision for giving advice and guidance to students on their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, such as therapeutic support, is not adequately developed.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4 4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	4

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

The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	4
--	----------

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership is ineffective because there is not the experience and expertise to create a viable vision and set high expectations for the school. Furthermore, the head of centre has not been given enough time or support to dedicate to a robust development of the school. As a result of external advice, a little more time and support has been made available, although this is still far from sufficient. The thinking behind the leadership and management for this school has been inadequate. There is no effective senior management structure in place and leadership roles undertaken by staff are only beginning to take shape. The aims and direction of the school are not clearly set out and this impacts adversely on developing the school effectively. One governor oversees the school but governors as a whole are ineffective in challenging the school's aims and monitoring rigorously its impact on students' achievement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	4
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

The four parents who returned questionnaires agreed or strongly agreed with the 13 statements on the school's work and its impact on their children. One concern related to students smoking in shared areas. The school has taken steps to stop this and no evidence was found to suggest it now occurs. Another concern was the lack of improvement of a child's literacy skills. Inspection findings confirm that the school needs

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

to improve provision for literacy as well as all other provision. Unlike the otherwise positive views of the parents who responded, the inspection found the school has a great deal of improvement to make before students' progress and achievement can be satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Centre 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 4 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 56 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	50	1	25	0	0	1	25
The school informs me about my child's progress	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	50	1	25	1	25	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)	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	50	1	25	0	0	1	25
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	50	1	50	0	0	1	25
The school is led and managed effectively	3	75	0	0	0	0	1	25
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	75	0	0	0	0	1	25

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.



16 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Centre School, Cottenham CB24 8UA

Thank you for the welcome my colleague and I received from you when we visited your school recently. Thanks go especially to the students who met with my colleague to share their views of your school. Our inspection told us that your school still has a long way to go before it can ensure you are learning all that you need to be well prepared for the next steps in your education or employment. We were pleased to see that you all get along reasonably well with the staff. They show they are concerned for your welfare and are keen that you make a success of school and your future.

You are not making enough progress and achieving all that you can. It was good to learn past students have gained qualifications, gone onto college or started jobs. We believe much more can be achieved by many of you and we have asked those who are responsible for leading and managing the school to do a number of things:

- give greater attention to measuring your progress to help you keep on track
- ensure your behaviour is well-managed so that disruptions and distractions in lessons do not interrupt learning
- improve teaching by assessing how much you have learnt in lessons
- improve your work and activities, particularly by making sure there are more opportunities for literacy and numeracy as well as a sharper focus on your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- strengthen the leadership and management of the school so that staff know how good a job they are doing and what is needed to improve the school further.

This is a lot of work for the headteacher and staff and it needs to be done urgently. Therefore, I have recommended outside help which means the local authority will be involved and inspectors will visit at regular intervals to check that progress has been made on the areas for improvement I have listed. You can do a great deal to help your school along this road, particularly by behaving well, attending every day, working hard, and achieving as much as you can. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon

Lead Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.