

Columbia Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134184
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	316243
Inspection dates	26–27 June 2008
Reporting inspector	David Smith

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Deborah Simmons
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2005
School address	Oxclose Road Washington NE38 7NY
Telephone number	0191 2193860
Fax number	0191 2193865

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

All pupils at Columbia Grange School have a statement of special educational need, reflecting the significant amount of extra help they require. Eleven of the children are in the Foundation Stage. Most of the pupils exhibit autistic spectrum disorders and the remainder have severe learning difficulties. There are no children looked after by the local authority and a third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The majority of the pupils are boys, which is usual in a school like Columbia Grange. The school provides extensive support throughout Sunderland to pupils exhibiting autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. The school has achieved many national awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where staff do all they can to ensure that this vulnerable group of pupils have a thoroughly enjoyable education. The pupils are a pleasure to be with as they gain the skills and confidence to increasingly work together rather than in isolation. The outstanding provision for the children in the Foundation Stage gets them off to such an impressive start at the school.

Leadership and management are outstanding and have ensured that there has been excellent progress since the last inspection. The school's self-review process is open, honest and accurate which helps to direct the outstanding capacity to improve. The governors are also central to the progress of this forward looking school. All involved with the school have every right to be proud of what is done to enrich the education and lives of the pupils and their families.

Pupils learn in a rich and stimulating environment and are provided with an outstanding curriculum. Displays throughout this exceptionally well maintained school celebrate pupils' achievement. The school is calm and purposeful, providing a consistent and stable setting that promotes pupils' excellent personal development. Teaching and learning are good, ensuring that pupils achieve well. There is no evidence to suggest that there is any difference in the progress of groups of pupils, such as boys and girls. The promotion of communication skills and the contribution of the support staff are major strengths in helping pupils to access their learning. They make good progress in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) but not enough opportunities are provided to use their skills in other subjects. Pupils enjoy taking part in role play and sing enthusiastically in the inspirational school assemblies.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are enhanced by the school's excellent links with a wide range of other professionals. It is excellent that the school makes such a major contribution to the education of pupils from across the local authority who exhibit autistic spectrum disorders. There was an excellent response to the parental questionnaires with overwhelming praise for the work of the school. Comments such as 'brilliant' and 'amazing' were typical responses about the work of the school. Parents are so very pleased that their child enjoys school so much. Their excellent attendance is major progress for many pupils. Taking into account the excellent quality of the provision and impressive outcomes for pupils, the school provides outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

An exceptional setting for learning is established in the school's outstanding Foundation Stage. This is made possible by the excellent leadership and management that help to promote such a strong team ethos. Teaching is inspirational which ensures that the children's achievement is outstanding in all aspects of their learning. Learning is made great fun and each child has a unique educational programme that boosts their capacity to learn. The staff team are very confident and develop excellent relationships with the children which provide them with the security to flourish. This is particularly marked in the progress in their ability to communicate, which removes some of the children's frustration and allows them to access learning. Comments such as, 'his language and behaviour have improved hugely' are typical of the very positive responses from parents. The use of assessment, to inform target setting and planning to meet individual needs, is excellent. Staff development is a particular strength which means that they

are able to fully meet children's complex and changing range of needs. Care, guidance and support are excellent and, as a result, children make excellent progress in their personal development and well-being. Their involvement in activities is greatly extended as they become more independent in preparation for the move to the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use ICT in the full range of subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Despite the complexity and diversity of their learning needs, pupils throughout the school make good progress towards their challenging targets and achieve well. These needs mean that they are unable to meet the national expectations for pupils in mainstream schools. The school has developed its own comprehensive system for tracking pupils' progress and this ensures that targets are carefully matched to individual needs. For example, the higher attaining pupils are provided with good levels of challenge to extend their writing and prepare for national tests. Pupils' excellent progress in their personal development gives them the skills to access the other aspects of their learning. This is a major strength of the school. Pupils make particularly good progress in their ability to communicate and learn to express themselves with greater confidence. They make good progress in numeracy and apply their knowledge to everyday situations. They thoroughly enjoy their learning in science and make good progress due to the extensive opportunities provided for practical work. Pupils make good progress in ICT but have insufficient opportunities to use it in other subjects. Their artwork is particularly impressive and contributed to the school gaining Artsmark Silver.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being is outstanding. Their spiritual, moral and social development is also outstanding whilst their cultural development is good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time in school, as demonstrated by their excellent attendance. They make excellent progress in developing healthy lifestyles and, as a result, the school gained Healthy School Status. The pupils are very active and the school helps them to make significant improvements to their diet. Members of staff know the pupils very well, develop excellent relationships and give them confidence to discuss with staff any worries they have. Through an extensive range of strategies pupils make excellent progress in developing acceptable behaviour. They make a good contribution to the community. The recently formed school council has already influenced the provision of clubs and activities and has ideas to further develop the excellent outdoor facilities. Lunch is a very positive social event and pupils really look forward to their clubs and activities. The inspirational assemblies reflect the excellent ethos and pupils warmly celebrate each other's achievement. Despite their complex needs, they make good progress in developing the capacity to work together. This prepares them successfully for secondary education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Typically, teaching is enthusiastic and very skilled. This has been helped by extensive professional development which has helped staff to meet pupils' complex learning needs. Staff use a wide range of strategies and resources very well to engage pupils who thoroughly enjoy their learning. Excellent assessment systems are used effectively to ensure pupils' work is neither too easy nor too difficult. Many parents commented on the vast improvements their child makes in school and what a great difference this makes to life at home. The staff team work very well together providing the essential consistency that helps to promote significant improvements in pupils' behaviour. The support makes an excellent contribution to pupils' learning. It is good that pupils are encouraged to take on more responsibility to, for example, tidy up at the end of a lesson and become more independent learners. Sometimes introductions to lessons are too long. This slows the pace of learning and contributes to good rather than outstanding progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. This is a leading school in developing an ever improving curriculum which is thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils. The rigorous monitoring of the curriculum helps to ensure that activities are very carefully tailored to meet the full range of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is enhanced by the excellent opportunities provided for pupils to learn alongside their mainstream peers. Teachers from mainstream schools are full of praise for the learning opportunities provided by the school. The provision for developing pupils' communication skills is impressive and this ensures that they can access their learning more widely. Staff also take every opportunity to extend pupils' numeracy skills in other subjects whilst the use of ICT is good but no better. The curriculum is very active and enriched to captivate the pupils and make learning fun. Displays throughout the school are very attractive and celebrate their achievement. Lunchtime activities are very popular and the staff team is always looking at ways of extending the current good range of after school activities. The views of pupils and parents have made a major contribution to the provision of extended activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils receive an outstanding quality of care, guidance and support. As a result, the school has excellent success in helping them overcome their complex learning difficulties and make good progress. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are securely in place. The school and grounds are maintained exceptionally well to provide a safe and attractive learning environment. Pupils' progress is regularly and accurately checked so that any additional support can be provided to boost progress. Pupils respond very well to praise for their progress and are aware of their targets. There is an impressive focus on providing equal opportunities for all pupils in this inclusive school. The working links with and contribution of a wide range of professionals to pupils' learning and personal development are excellent. The support provided for parents and opportunities provided for them to work with the school are outstanding. Pupils are very carefully prepared for the move to their next school. The guidance and support provided for mainstream pupils exhibiting autistic spectrum disorders is a major strength of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The energy and enthusiasm of the headteacher and senior leaders are infectious and this helps to promote such a forward looking school. Pupils make excellent progress towards their personal development targets which allows them to make good progress towards their challenging learning targets. This is helped by outstanding links with parents and other agencies. It is impressive that senior leaders, staff and governors are constantly striving to develop an even better school. They all drive forward an excellent capacity to improve. The school's leadership and management of support for pupils exhibiting autistic spectrum disorders across the Local Authority are excellent. This ensures that the staff team is kept up-to-date with developments in mainstream schools and, also they share their expertise with mainstream colleagues. Responsibility and accountability is taken very seriously at all levels across the school and all staff contribute to and share in the school's planning for the future. The school provides a wealth of very valuable training for their own staff and staff from other schools. Columbia Grange has a deservedly high reputation in the region. The contribution of the governing body is outstanding. They know the school very well and provide a very perceptive balance of support and challenge to senior leaders.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Columbia Grange School, Sunderland, NE38 7NY

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to your school. Thank you for making me feel so welcome in your wonderful school. In particular, thanks to the school council for giving up some of their time to talk with me and I hope you get your wish for an enchanted garden – you deserve it!

Columbia Grange is an outstanding school. You are so lucky to have an outstanding headteacher with such a talented team of staff and governors.

Those of you in the excellent Foundation Stage are so busy and make such rapid progress. You all make outstanding progress in the way you get on with others and make yourselves understood. This and the good teaching help you to make such good progress in your learning. All of the staff work so very well with you to make sure that you have excellent activities, enjoy your learning and are kept safe. I was particularly impressed with the fact that you hardly miss a day at school. Also, it is great that so many of you have the chance to go into mainstream schools and pupils come in to share their learning with you.

Even an outstanding school can get better. I know that your school has many exciting plans for the future. As you are so good at using computers I have asked the school to make sure that you have more opportunities to use them in as many lessons as possible.

With best wishes

David Smith

Lead inspector