

Wren Spinney Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122158
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	359177
Inspection dates	28–29 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Cain
Headteacher	Debbie Withers
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2007
School address	Westover Road Off Westhill Drive, Kettering NN15 7LB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed eight lessons and eight teachers and saw a post-16 instructor and teaching assistants leading a session at 'The Shop'. They held meetings with staff and representatives of the governing body and spoke informally with students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at information about students' attainment and progress, evidence of monitoring and self-evaluation, and documents indicating how well the school safeguards its students. They analysed 18 responses to the parental questionnaire, together with those from members of staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Inspectors looked at how well different groups of pupils achieve and, in particular, how effectively the school meets the needs of those with the most complex needs.
- They explored the features of the curriculum and care, guidance and support that led the school to judge them as outstanding.
- They investigated how 'The Shop' contributes to the progress and personal development of older pupils.
- They considered how well leaders at all levels use self-evaluation and monitoring to drive school improvement and improve the quality of teaching.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized special school for students with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. A high proportion of the students have autistic spectrum disorders, most have communication difficulties and some have complex learning difficulties or medical needs. All the students have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well-below average. A few pupils are looked after by the local authority, boys outnumber girls by three to one and almost all the pupils are of White British heritage. In addition to the main school site, older students spend some of their time at 'The Shop' in Kettering town centre which is leased by the school. This satellite base provides opportunities for students to engage in work-related learning and partnership working with other local mainstream and special schools and with community groups. The school has gained a number of awards including Arts Mark Silver, Quality in Extended Schools Award, International School Award, the School Council Silver Award, Financial Management Standard in Schools and has National Healthy Schools status. It provides outreach support and a loan library of communication aids for both mainstream and special schools.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. It enables students to achieve well, make good progress in their learning and exceptional gains in their personal development. Most parents and carers who expressed their views reveal a high level of satisfaction with the school's work. One said, 'My son has absolutely loved being at Wren Spinney and it will be a sad day when he has to leave.' Another commented, 'My son has made huge progress and is involved in various activities, especially 'The Shop' which has been very important to help him to be more confident and has given him the opportunity to learn a lot in the community.'

The curriculum promotes students' learning and personal development exceptionally well. It provides them with a wide range of varied experiences closely matched to their individual needs and interests. 'The Shop' is an exemplary feature of this, and fosters the development of students' independence and life skills extremely well. It is also a key factor in the school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion and students' exceptional contribution to the wider community. Staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support for students. In particular, they ensure that students receive excellent careers guidance and opportunities to learn about the world of work. Safeguarding permeates the life of the school and ensures that students feel extremely safe and secure. They respond exceptionally well to the school's outstanding promotion of healthy living, and there is a high uptake for sporting activities, such as dance, football and yoga. The staff's very well-developed skills in managing the students, including those who present the greatest challenge, mean that behaviour is outstanding and the school is a calm and orderly place. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as a result of the way the school raises students' self-esteem, and provides them with opportunities to develop their social skills and learn about other cultures. Students show care and kindness to one another and develop greatly in confidence as they move through the school.

The headteacher and other senior leaders demonstrate an outstanding commitment to making the school as good as possible for the students. The accuracy of their self-evaluation, combined with their ambition and drive for improvement means that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve further. It has an excellent track record of improvement, for instance, areas for development identified at the last inspection are now major strengths of the school's work. Central to this is the innovation and flair evident in the development of 'The Shop'. Outstanding partnerships with other organisations and businesses have helped to translate the headteacher's vision for this extension to the school's provision into a highly effective enterprise that benefits the students and the wider community. Many aspects of the school's work are led exceptionally well but senior leaders recognise, rightly, that while teaching is good and occasionally outstanding, there is more to do to raise staff awareness of what constitutes exceptional teaching. The school has recently appointed a new member of staff to co-ordinate and develop the use of

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technological communication aids. This has already led to some important improvements but aids such as switches do not feature in all lessons as strongly as they could in supporting the learning of non-verbal students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the existing strengths in teaching and learning by:
 - raising staff awareness of what constitutes outstanding teaching through training and visits to schools where teaching is exceptional
 - increasing opportunities for non-verbal students to use switches and other technological devices to give them a consistent 'voice' in lessons
 - ensuring that teachers make maximum use of time so that lessons always proceed at a brisk and lively pace
 - placing greater focus at senior and middle leadership levels on developing excellence in teaching.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Achievement is good and the school's thorough records show that some students make outstanding progress. Those with autistic spectrum disorders do particularly well, increasing their eye contact and skills in interacting with others. As a result, they now seek out adults to communicate with and show an increased tolerance of unfamiliar situations. Throughout the school, students make good progress in recording their ideas in symbols or print, and some make outstanding progress in communication. Students make good progress in mathematics, especially in applying their skills in everyday situations. All students meet a high proportion of the individual targets set for them. The achievement of girls, students with the most complex needs, those of minority ethnic heritage, and pupils who are looked after by the local authority is similar to that of their peers. Students enjoy school a great deal and they are enthusiastic and active participants in all that it has to offer. In an outstanding mathematics lesson in Years 10 and 11, students made exceptional progress in developing their knowledge of addition and subtraction. They concentrated extremely well, not wasting a minute, and took pride in the significant amount of work they produced. There are examples of students who have very good opportunities to express themselves through the use of technological aids. However, on occasion, there are missed opportunities to promote the communication of non-verbal students through the use of switches and other aids.

Students make outstanding progress in developing their personal, social and independence skills. They enjoy excellent relationships with one another and with the adults who support them. They have a definite voice in decision-making through the school council and some take part in the 'Shooting Stars Group' at county level. Students develop an outstanding knowledge of the world of work and develop a wide range of enterprise skills. Jobs available around the school are advertised and students submit their curriculum vitae to apply for the vacancies. An even more exceptional feature of their development is the way older students run 'The Shop' in the town centre, where they are not only ambassadors for the school but present a positive image of what people with learning difficulties can achieve. In 'The Shop', they greet and serve customers, use the cash till, make products to sell, package goods and take responsibility for the appearance of the premises.

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Students in the sixth form run their own car-washing business and more able students attend sessions about banking and personal finance run by bankers.

Students demonstrate their growing confidence and awareness of keeping safe not only in school but also when learning to travel independently and moving around within the community, for instance, going to college and taking part in work-related activities. They develop a wide range of skills that are highly relevant to the next phase of their lives and most attend school very regularly. The attendance rate is satisfactory overall, however, because a very few students have significant periods of absence for hospital stays or because they have degenerative conditions that result in time off school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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.

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum provides students with outstanding and memorable learning opportunities. These include exhilarating physical experiences on residential trips, taking part in varied activities with the many visitors to the school, finding out about many other cultures and singing with other school choirs in front of an audience of 7,500 at the O2 Stadium in London. Links through extended schools include partnership with sports coaches and opportunities to work with theatre groups. After-school clubs are varied and change

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termly, and the curriculum is enlivened by stimulating whole-school topics and special events. On a day-to-day basis, the consistent application of highly structured approaches provides students with a dependable environment where they are able to focus and engage with learning. The school has excellent partnerships with a range of therapists and other agencies in meeting students' varied needs, and their personal care plans, behaviour management plans and feeding plans are regularly reviewed. The highly focused work of the parent support worker provides support for all students and particularly those with autistic spectrum disorders. This has led to the development of very effective strategies for managing challenging behaviour at home, as well as developing their communication skills.

Teachers plan their lessons well and make good use of their knowledge of students' needs and prior attainment. Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is good and it is completely seamless in the best lessons. Staff ensure that students learn through practical activities, real-life situations and direct sensory experiences. They make exceptionally good use of signing, symbols, pictures and objects when teaching new skills or eliciting a response from students. There are examples where technological aids have opened up new opportunities for individual students. For instance, the use of voice-operated communication aids tailor-made to individual needs has reduced the frustration for a number of students. The use of a 'resonance board' with a student with profound and multiple learning difficulties has enabled him to engage and interact for the first time with an adult. However, teachers do not use technological aids such as switches as consistently as they could in all lessons for non-verbal students. In addition, the pace of learning drops at times, especially where students have to wait their turn for too long during whole-class activities.

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 headteacher provides visionary leadership and is passionate about meeting students' needs. She is supported very well by senior leaders and a number of aspects of the school's work are led exceptionally well. These include the curriculum, work-related learning, students' personal development, care, guidance and support, and the sixth form. Senior leaders make good use of data to check the progress of individuals and groups of students, and ensure that they all receive equal opportunities. Leaders have good procedures in place for monitoring teaching but information gathered on a daily basis through walking around the school and going into classrooms is not always used as strategically as it could be. Members of the governing body are supportive to the school and find out about its work for themselves, for instance, through visits and being linked to

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particular subjects. This helps to ensure that they have a good understanding of the school's work and insight into students' needs.

The school's promotion of community cohesion is excellent and 'The Shop' is the jewel in the crown of its work, placing it in the centre of Kettering community life. School leaders are very outward looking in involving students in local and national events, and in ongoing correspondence with students in the international partner school in Romania. In addition, a variety of partnerships contributes to students' development and well-being and benefits the wider community, other educational establishments and businesses.

The school gives highest priority to ensuring that students are kept safe and its policies and procedures far exceed statutory requirements. For example, staff training in child protection is updated termly instead of every three years and midday supervisors receive detailed guidance. 'The Shop' has been designated by the local authority as one of only three 'places of safety' for members of the public in the town centre - as part of a new initiative - because of the school's meticulous procedures for risk assessment.

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	2
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The school makes outstanding provision for students at post-16 through a curriculum that is tailored precisely to their individual needs, interests and aspirations. It offers a careful balance of support and challenge so that students develop independence by taking increasing responsibility for themselves at school and in the community. Students rise to the high expectations of staff and develop to their full potential, especially in their social and communication skills, personal care and independent living skills, confidence and self-esteem. A very wide range of activities offered through the school, two local colleges, the county-wide special schools consortium, 'The Shop' and the community prepare students very well for life when they leave Wren Spinney. Students achieve exceptionally well and

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many exceed their individual targets. They have good opportunities to gain accreditation matched to their individual needs, including through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award Scheme.

Excellent transition arrangements, supported by thorough planning, involves a range of outside agencies and parents and carers to ensure all students transfer smoothly when the time comes for them to move on.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with all the statements. Respondents particularly appreciate the way the school develops their children's independence and life skills, and meets their individual needs. They praise the approachability of the staff and the happy environment they provide for students. Inspection findings endorse parents' and carers' positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wren Spinney Community Special 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 18 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 54 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	72	5	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	72	4	22	1	6	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	67	5	28	0	0	1	6
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	61	6	33	1	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	67	6	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	56	7	39	0	0	1	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	50	8	44	1	6	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)	9	50	7	39	1	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	61	7	39	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	61	7	39	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	50	8	44	1	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	67	5	28	0	0	1	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	72	4	22	1	6	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 all 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



30 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Wren Spinney Community Special School, Kettering, NN15 7LB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school. We very much enjoyed our visit, finding out about all the exciting things you do and looking at your learning in lessons. I am delighted to tell you that Wren Spinney is an outstanding school. There are many fantastic things about your school and here are some of the most important:

'The Shop' provides you with wonderful opportunities to develop new skills and learn to become confident and independent

- you make good progress with your learning and some of you do really well
- your behaviour is excellent and you get on very well together
- you help with many jobs around the school and find out so much about different types of work
- you have many exciting and interesting experiences
- the staff care about you a great deal and provide you with outstanding support
- teaching is good and the school pays really careful attention to your individual needs
- the headteacher does an excellent job and all the leaders want to make the school even better for you.

We want to help them with this and so we have asked them to make sure that all lessons are lively and move at a good pace. We would like them to make more use of switches and other equipment to help those of you who cannot talk, and they are going to work together to find ways of increasing the amount of teaching that is outstanding. You can help by working hard, as you already do, and enjoying the rest of your time at Wren Spinney.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector

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