

St Catherine's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118226
Local Authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	358290
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascal

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	10–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Paddie Collyer
Headteacher	Grenville Shipley
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 September 2007
School address	Grove Road Ventnor Isle of Wight PO38 1TT
Telephone number	01983 852722
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Boarding provision	St Catherine's
Social care Unique Reference Number	SC012597
Social care inspector	David Coulter

Age group	10–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons and observed nine teachers. Meetings were held with governors, staff and students. Students' work, information on their progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires from 14 parents and carers, 31 staff and 16 students were scrutinised.

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

- How effectively data is analysed and how it is used to bring about improvements in student progress.
- How effectively senior managers monitor the curriculum and ensure that students receive a broad and balanced curriculum.
- How well governors know the school and challenge it to bring about improvements.
- How well challenging behaviours are managed to ensure students access learning and make progress.

Information about the school

St Catherine's is a day and residential special school for students with speech and communication difficulties. An increasing number of students have additional needs, including autistic spectrum disorder and learning difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs. There has been a drop in the number of students on roll. The school has gained the Sports Quality Mark and the Healthy Schools Award.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Catherine's is a good school that successfully supports students to improve their communication skills and become confident young people, well prepared for life when they leave school. This is achieved through excellent partnerships with a range of professionals who work closely with staff to support students in developing their skills. This partnership is most evident in the very effective links between speech and language therapists and teaching staff which enable students to make particularly good progress in their language and literacy skills. Overall, students achieve well and make good progress. They get off to a good start in the primary class and progress continues all the way through to the sixth form. The focus on life skills and independence is good throughout the school and as a result, students develop their skills well. Teaching across the school is good and there are clear strengths, particularly in the planning of work for individuals. Whilst teachers have a good understanding of how well students are doing, not all ensure that students know what they need to do to improve their work.

Students clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good and often excellent attendance. They show a very well-developed understanding about how to keep safe, talking sensibly about looking after themselves. They demonstrate a good knowledge of keeping healthy, although there are occasional moans about school dinners because of the lack of chips and chicken nuggets! Students benefit greatly from good opportunities to attend college and work experience through the curriculum. They develop a good range of social skills and recognise what is acceptable behaviour. Behaviour around the school is good and students are polite and friendly.

Effective leadership by the Principal, supported by his senior management team, has enabled the school to develop well. There is a good understanding of the areas for improvement and these are monitored very closely by staff and the governing body. Quick action is taken when weaknesses are identified and there are clear plans to move the school forward. As a result, the school has good capacity to sustain the progress it is making. The school is now data rich and has improved greatly its systems for collating all teachers' assessments regarding student progress. The progress of individual students is checked regularly and this ensures that all students have equal access and opportunity to all the school offers. However, the school is at an early stage in analysing the progress of different groups. As a result, staff, governors and other stakeholders, although very clear about the achievements of individuals, do not always have a clear enough overview of the progress of the

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different groups within the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine systems for analysing the data regarding students' progress to ensure the school can provide a clear overview of the progress of the different groups within the school
- Improve systems for enabling students to have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment of students is well below that expected nationally because of their special educational needs. Despite this, many gain GCSEs and Entry level accreditation by the time they leave the sixth form. Students achieve extremely well in English and this is a major achievement, considering their specific special needs. They make good progress in practical subjects, particularly in art, music and design and technology. In a lesson for Year 9, students concentrated well in making a mechanism and showed good sense in using the tools. They were able to explain how a cam worked and identify the impact of using different shaped cams. Younger pupils make good progress, for example in identifying the authors of various books. A more able student showed good recall of the events of the story being read and the names of characters. Data gathered by the school shows that students, including those in the care of the local authority, achieve equally well.

Students are rightly very proud of their work and are keen to show it to visitors, explaining what they have achieved. They talk very positively about how the school has helped them improve and how much more confident they are since starting at school. They enjoy all the different responsibilities they have in school. As they get older, they take on more responsibility and some are involved in the young Chamber of Commerce and Wight to be Heard conference. Students are involved in their own community and the local community. They attend local clubs and are keen to support others through fundraising. They have good links with a school in Ghana and are also in contact with schools in France and Sweden.

There are a very small number of students with challenging behaviours. They respond well to the school's support, and other students take little notice when they behave inappropriately. Students' social and moral development is very good and they are clear about what is right and wrong. There are good opportunities for students to reflect, and displays around the school raise their awareness of the world around them. For example, there was a good informal discussion in the hallway when students watched the news showing the rescue of the Chilean miners. They reflected, with a member of staff, what it was like to go up in the rescue pod to the top and how they would feel.

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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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers know their students well and work is often planned to meet the individual needs of each student. This is very evident in literacy sessions where groups supported by teachers and support assistants work on different aspects of literacy dependent on their need. The effective teamwork between teachers and speech and language therapists does much to support students' learning through focusing on the specific needs of the individuals. Relationships with students are positive, enabling students to feel confident and respond to questions. In some subjects such as mathematics and science, students are beginning to evaluate how well they are doing, indicating whether they feel they understand the topic they have studied and whether or not they enjoyed the work. Assessment is much sharper than at the time of the previous inspection and teachers have good awareness of the levels students are working at. In some subjects such as art, students can see what level they are working at and how they can improve. However, this is not consistent in many subjects and although marking is up to date, it rarely informs students what they need to do improve their work.

The curriculum provides a good range of experiences, particularly in the primary class and for Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, there are appropriate opportunities for work experience and college taster courses as well as vocational opportunities. However, the school is looking to extend the range of opportunities further in order that the curriculum will be able to meet the increasingly wide range of special needs

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

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within the school. The development of literacy across the school is excellent, with very good attention paid to subject specific vocabulary. The school is in the process of ensuring that the same high level cross-curricular provision is given to numeracy and information and communication technology. The care, guidance and support of students have many strengths. The progress of each individual against their targets is monitored very closely by all staff to ensure their needs are being met. As a result, students make good progress against their individual education targets. Students' targets are given a high profile by being stuck in their homework books. Occasionally, however, the wording in the targets is not accessible to the students and staff are in the process of checking that targets are all child friendly. The very close work between staff and the wide range of agencies involved with students ensures that students are well cared for. Links with parents and carers are good and they comment on how well they and their children are supported by staff.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders are supported by a strong staff team, many of whom are very experienced in working with the special needs of the students. They are clearly committed to ensuring that students make the best possible progress. There is regular monitoring of teaching, ensuring that any weaknesses are identified and addressed. The school has achieved much in gathering a range of data and is beginning to use this more effectively to check the progress of different groups. For example, senior staff have identified that boys make better progress than girls in mathematics and science and are taking action to address this. The school's effective monitoring of individuals ensures that all students have the same opportunities and that there is no discrimination. Governors challenge the school well and monitor the progress of developments very closely. They have a clear understanding of many aspects of the school and are keen to ensure they have a better understanding of the progress of the different groups within the school. The governing body is particularly vigilant about safeguarding arrangements and these are exemplary. Community cohesion is promoted well throughout the school. There are strong links with other local schools and within the community. The links developed nationally and internationally have done much to raise students' awareness and involvement in the wider community.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students achieve well in the sixth form. This is because the curriculum is focused on providing students with the skills they need for the world of work and further education. All students have their own personalised curriculum tailored to their individual needs. As a result, students make good progress, both academically and in their personal development. There is an increasing range of opportunities to gain accreditation and good attention is given to vocational skills. The progress of students is tracked carefully and data shows that there is no difference in the progress of the different groups. Teaching and learning are good and students are very much involved in assessing their own progress. Students comment on how much they like the sixth form and the fact that they are treated as adults. They enjoy the increased responsibilities they are given, particularly in being more independent. They develop into confident young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Leadership and management are good and ensure very close working relationships with a range of professionals. There is effective monitoring of provision and the head of sixth form has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the department. Procedures for safeguarding are excellent and result in students having a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2

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Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	

Boarding provision

The school's admission process provides opportunities for students and their families to visit prior to making any commitment. Guides that detail boarding provision are provided to all prospective entrants. On admission, all students are subject to an assessment process that identifies their specific social, cultural, educational and health needs. From the information received, placement plans are developed. Placement plans are updated in line with changing circumstances.

The school has dedicated nursing staff who closely monitor the health and well-being of each student. Nursing staff provide treatment, arrange medical appointments and deliver health education on an individual and group basis. When required, specialist help is sought from a range of services, including child and adolescent psychiatry. There has, in recent times, been a significant increase in the number of students requiring occupational therapy.

The concept of healthy living is promoted throughout the school and students are encouraged to eat wisely and take regular exercise. The experienced catering staff use fresh produce to create nutritionally balanced meals. Students and staff talked in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food on offer.

The school operates within a risk management framework designed to keep students safe. There are well-established safeguarding policies and working practices that minimise risks. Staff are well aware of their responsibilities to report any safeguarding issues or concerns. There are security features around the site and risk assessments are undertaken for all off-site activities. Staff have developed a range of policies, procedures and working practices to address areas of potential concern such as bullying or individuals absconding.

As a consequence of their communication difficulties, many students lack self-confidence. Working on the principle that 'success can breed success', staff assist students to identify achievable goals in areas such as cooking, personal hygiene, budgeting and independent travel. Staff are exceptionally good at exploiting the safety offered by an island environment to develop community-based training programmes.

Although there is an expectation that students will adhere to a set of acceptable behaviours, there is an acknowledgement that due to their communication difficulties and levels of understanding, each individual needs to be treated differently. Speech therapists provide staff with strategies on how to achieve effective communication with each individual. Sanctions are used sparingly and normally consist of a withdrawal of a privilege. All residential staff undertake training on behaviour

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management.

Residential accommodation is of a generally good standard. The majority of students occupy single rooms; however, those in junior houses are provided with an option to share. Proposed developments within Grove House need to ensure that any new rooms provide appropriate privacy. Each residential unit was observed to be clean, tidy and in good decorative order. Communal areas are appropriately furnished and are conducive for socialising. The further education units provide suitable facilities for the development of independent living skills. Accommodation is subject to regular maintenance.

The school operates with a team of dedicated and well-qualified residential workers. The team benefits from the effective leadership of an experienced manager. Social interactions between students and staff were observed to be spontaneous and warm. Relationships are based on mutual respect. Staff are pro-active in advocating on behalf of the students in their care.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good and students have opportunities to experience activities associated with different groups and cultures. Efforts are made to ensure that the religious and cultural needs of students are met. The school recognises the celebrations associated with the major world religions. Strong ties have been established with a school in Ghana and staff and students help raise money annually for its upkeep.

The views of students are regularly sought about all aspects of their lives within boarding. Each boarding house is represented on the student council. Students are aware of how to raise concerns or make a complaint. All maintain regular contact with their families and effective lines of communication have been established between parents and boarding staff.

Evidence shows the quality of the residential provision is exceptional. The 'boarding experience' makes a significant contribution to life at the school. Staff have created a stimulating environment in which students can feel safe, have fun and develop a range of social and life skills. Students described boarding life as 'good' and 'great'. Special mention was made of the support received from staff and the social and recreational activities on offer.

This is the grade for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	1
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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the impact it has had on their children, particularly on how much progress they have made and their enjoyment of school. Their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote,

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'In all aspects – educational, social, emotional – my daughter is making excellent progress... all the staff – teaching, therapy, care, admin, domestic – perform a wonderful job. They achieve so much within a professional but happy homely environment.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Catherine's 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 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 53 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	86	2	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	79	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	57	5	36	1	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	64	5	36	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	8	57	6	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	50	6	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	71	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	64	5	36	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	79	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	43	7	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	57	6	43	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	71	3	21	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	79	3	21	0	0	0	0

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

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. 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 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.



14 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Catherine's School, Ventnor PO38 1TT

Thank you so much for being so friendly and helpful when we came to visit your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you all and a special thank you to those of you who went to the meetings and talked to Mrs Bull.

We think your school is a good school. We know that you work very hard in lessons and, because of this, you do well in your learning. It is good to see how happy you are in school and we were very impressed at how much you knew about keeping yourselves safe. The school makes sure you are well cared for. You know a lot about keeping healthy and it was good to hear about all the different activities you are involved in. Your teachers know you well and help you learn a lot of things.

The school is well led by the Principal, and the staff work hard to make sure you do well. Because the school wants to be even better, we have asked staff to do two things. The first is to make better use of all the information they have about your progress so that they can check how well the different groups in school are doing. The second thing is to make sure you know how well you are doing and know what you need to do to improve your work.

We wish you well for the future and hope you continue with all your hard work.

Yours sincerely

Sarah

Sarah J Mascal
Lead inspector

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