

Granta School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134937
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE LA
Inspection number	316295
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2007
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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	103
6th form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lee Ginger
Headteacher	Mrs Lucie Calow
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cambridge Road Linton Cambridgeshire CB21 4NN
Telephone number	01223 896890
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an all-age area special school for pupils with complex needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Although attainment on entry is well below average, as a result of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, there is a fairly wide ability spread. The school opened in September 2006 as one of two new special schools in Cambridgeshire to which pupils transferred following the closure of four previous schools. The Granta School opened with 78 pupils, has quickly increased to 103 and is expected to expand to take 150. Many staff transferred from the four schools that closed and the school has recruited some additional teachers, and is still recruiting, to fill particular posts and in response to the growing pupil numbers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is already a satisfactory school with some good features, which has come a long way in the short time since it opened just over a year ago. The headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of staff and parents. She has been very successful in bringing together into a seamless whole the large number of staff and pupils who came from the four schools that closed. She has strengthened the staff team in response to growing numbers of pupils and is clearly bringing out the best in her staff. This is a significant achievement and there is a strong sense of energy and passion amongst managers in key positions. A great deal of development has taken place in just over a year since the school opened, much of this against a backdrop of initial difficulties with the accommodation. Leadership and management are good overall and the headteacher is supported well by other staff with management responsibilities. The school has received outstanding support and challenge from the governing body. Senior staff have necessarily focused on putting in place an education that is at least satisfactory but which they recognise needs to be refined. Improving provision further is largely a matter of time. A parent accurately captures the situation, saying 'I am sure there is more to do, but feel confident that the management team have their focus on achieving excellence'.

Through working closely with a multi-professional team, including a range of therapists, the school has been effective in assessing how much support pupils require to meet their personal and care needs. It is meeting these needs well. Pupils make good progress in their personal development and feel safe and happy. Managers are aware that the school needs to increase the accuracy of its assessment of pupils' existing skills, knowledge and understanding to inform target setting, lesson planning and form a basis for measuring and tracking their progress. This is the most important challenge that faces the school and it is necessary to the further improvement of teaching, which is currently satisfactory, and to raising achievement. Standards are well below average as a result of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, but their achievement is satisfactory overall and good in the Foundation Stage.

The arrangement of pupils into 'access groups', according to their preferred style of learning, has been a good initial move and enabled the school to cope with the staggered arrival of a large number of pupils, until staff find out more about exactly what they can already do. Managers are carefully reflecting on how to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the full range of pupils more fully. The school has already developed some good links with other educational establishments, most notably with Linton Village College with which it shares a campus, and is increasingly making use of the community to enrich pupils' learning.

Senior staff have begun to evaluate the school's effectiveness and managers have undertaken some useful audits into aspects of provision. There is, as yet, no coherent system in place for monitoring all aspects of the school's work and for analysing findings to form a meaningful evaluation of its effectiveness. There is, nevertheless, a clear sense of shared direction and the school is well placed to improve further. It is already providing satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactorily for students at post-16. It pays careful attention to developing their skills of self-reliance to equip them as far as possible to manage their lives independently. Students make satisfactory progress in response to a satisfactory range of learning experiences.

The curriculum follows the 'Moving On' accredited course and is constantly under review to ensure flexibility in meeting the individual needs of all students. The close link with Linton Village College provides good opportunities for individual students to follow a small number of GCSE courses and to participate in a range of activities. Students also benefit from their visits to Cambridge Regional College and to Snakehall Farm, where they take part in multi-skills and art courses and mix with students from other special schools. Opportunities for students to take part in work experience are well organised and the school works closely with Connexions in providing good care for students. The school is planning to extend the range of courses on offer and provision is developing well as a result of good leadership.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school provides well for children in the Foundation Stage. Children are making good progress in response to good teaching. Sessions are planned very thoroughly to meet individual needs, especially in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. Planning is informed by good assessment procedures, which involve therapists and other agencies when children join the school and by ongoing recording of their progress towards the Early Learning Goals. Parents are kept well informed through detailed entries in home-school diaries, though they are not yet being involved as much as they could be in their children's learning. The school has begun to make use of the community to extend the range of learning opportunities provided, for example, through trips to the park and the shops. Teamwork between the staff is good and the coordinator has a thorough knowledge of the needs of this age group. She provides good leadership and management, based on high expectations and clear vision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish a comprehensive system for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and use the resulting information in setting individual targets, planning lessons, and tracking pupils' progress.
- Develop a system for evaluating the school's effectiveness and build into this procedures for analysing the findings of monitoring undertaken by managers at all levels.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an OFSTED inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall and pupils make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Some parents say that they have seen marked improvement in their children's progress since moving to the school, whereas a few feel that their children are not being challenged enough. Inspection findings support both these views because there is variation in the amount of progress pupils make. There are instances of pupils exceeding previous expectations of their capabilities, for instance, where they are studying for GCSE in design and technology and science at the adjoining secondary school, and in physical education. In addition, pupils make good progress in some lessons where teachers' expectations are high and tasks and approaches matched well to the needs of different groups. This is not always the case,

however, and the school is working to improve on the satisfactory progress pupils make in literacy and numeracy and to extend the range of courses available for older pupils. At present, those at Key Stage 4 and post-16 are making satisfactory progress on accredited courses, such as ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Transition Challenge or the Bronze Award, and some are gaining additional vocational skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils develop a strong sense of trust and enjoy school because they feel safe and well cared for. They have very good relationships with their teachers and support assistants. Personal, social and health education has a strongly positive influence on pupils' social and moral understanding and contributes well to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance is good. Through opportunities for regular sports and encouragement for healthy choices, pupils make good progress in developing an awareness of a healthy lifestyle. Behaviour is good and there is an orderly and happy atmosphere in the school. Pupils are generally interested and cooperative during lessons and, with the encouragement of staff, are keen to take part in all the activities provided for them. They respond well to opportunities to take responsibility as members of the school council and contribute to the community by helping to raise funds to support charities. Pupils are gaining confidence in sharing their views and ideas and this has resulted, for instance, in improvements to the quality of the outside play resources. The promotion of pupils' future economic well-being is satisfactory owing to the progress they are making in developing basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving. There is a fair amount of good teaching but there are also inconsistencies that result from bringing together a large group of staff from four schools, which all had different expectations. At times expectations are not as high as they could be, especially for more able pupils in mixed ability groups, and lessons sometimes lack pace. The appointment of a number of subject specialist teachers is helping to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers often use interactive whiteboards well and they match resources effectively to the preferred learning style of the pupils. The use of teaching assistants, and the impact they make on pupils' progress, is not yet as well developed as it could be. The school has, rightly, identified this as a development priority. Individual education plans are satisfactory, based mainly on the objectives identified at annual reviews. Otherwise, the school is at an early stage in arriving at a thorough assessment of pupils' academic attainment and, therefore being able to identify how best to help them to make the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has put a satisfactory curriculum in place but managers are aware that there is more work to be done to match opportunities fully to pupils' needs. The way the curriculum is currently organised is effectively tiding the school over, as it adjusts and gradually moulds provision to meet the particular needs of different groups of pupils. An example of this is the way pupils are organised into access groups according to their preferred learning style - visual, sensory, exploratory and formal. This was done in response to the need to accommodate all the different pupils from different schools, who arrived all at once with vastly different experiences and needs. This was a good idea as an initial response to the challenge the school faced. The school is increasingly using the community to enrich learning opportunities and, rightly, looking to extend the range of accredited courses and work-related learning opportunities for older pupils. The physical education curriculum is already a strength, with many pupils taking part in regular sports including a sports festival and tournaments with other schools. There is a good range of enrichment activities, particularly in drama, music and sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. There are clear procedures for child protection, risk assessments and for medical and emergency aid, with regular training for staff. Pupils are kept safe and the quality of care is high. The school is a safe and happy environment that instils in pupils a sense of security and gives them the confidence to learn. Procedures for managing behaviour are good, including that of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Working relationships are well established with a range of therapists, other professionals and agencies who visit the school regularly. Pupils' personal and care needs are assessed thoroughly with input from the multi-professional team, including therapists and the school nurse. Parents and carers are involved fully in the review of their child's progress and individual education plans provide a satisfactory foundation to support pupils' overall progress. The school is at an early stage, however, in establishing a system for tracking pupils' academic progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior leaders have been successful in sharing their vision for the school and are systematically raising the expectations of the whole staff so that there is a shared sense of purpose. Managers are very reflective practitioners and prepared to be innovative in their quest to develop Granta into an outstanding school. They are committed to finding the best solutions to meet the needs of all the pupils and are prioritising well. There is a surprising sense of coherence in the school, given that it has only been open just a year, and staff morale is high. A good range of specialist knowledge is evident amongst managers leading development, for instance to extend provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

Subject coordinators have begun to take responsibility effectively and identified necessary developments. However, the role of key stage coordinators is less clearly established. The school does not yet have sufficient data for this to form the backbone of its self-evaluation and, though some valuable monitoring is already taking place, has not yet found a way of bringing the findings of this together. Governors have been very actively involved in resolving initial problems with the accommodation. They regularly visit the school and produce perceptive reports that help to inform decision-making and shape school development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

22 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Granta School, Linton, CB21 4NN

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit very much, and now I am writing to tell you about what we found.

Granta School is already a satisfactory school with some good features, and it has come a long way in the short time since it opened just over a year ago. The headteacher has quickly made everybody feel confident so that the school feels like one big happy family. We could see that you are happy and that you trust the people who work with you. The school cares for you well and it is helping you to make good progress in learning to get on with one another and in gaining independence. Most of you are making satisfactory progress with your work, although you make good progress in some lessons. Those of you who have some of your lessons at Linton Village College are doing well with your GCSE work. Those of you in Early Years are also making good progress.

The school is getting better all the time and the headteacher and other people who manage it are really keen to make it as good as it can possibly be for you. We have asked them to do this by making sure that:

- they find out all about what you can already do so that they know what to teach you next
- they find a way of checking what is working best in the school and how it could be improved.

You can help them by working hard and by enjoying all the wonderful facilities available to you in this brand new school.

Best wishes

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector