

Maplewood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108880
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	324856
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs June Fawkes
Headteacher	Mr Gary Mellefont
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2005
School address	Redcar Road Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR5 5PA
Telephone number	0191 5535587
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school for boys and girls with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All have a statement of special educational need. Many pupils have additional learning difficulties and attainment on entry is usually very low. All pupils are of White British heritage. Most pupils are admitted other than at the usual time of first admission and a few leave before the end of Year 6 to rejoin mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Its effectiveness in meeting the most pressing needs of its pupils, their personal development and well-being, is outstanding. Exceptional care, guidance and support contribute enormously to this. Parents are almost unanimous in their gratitude for the ways in which the school is helping their children to address their needs and secure better futures for themselves. 'My child goes to school without crying now', is a comment from a parent, which sums up the way in which Maplewood contributes to the happiness of pupils and the transformation of their lives.

This is all made possible by good leadership and management, characterised by the way they relentlessly pursue further improvement by identifying how to build upon strengths and eliminate weaknesses in teaching, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support of pupils. This is a better school now than when it was last inspected and it has an exceptional capacity for further improvement, given the dedication and vision of a relatively new management team.

The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means they do not meet the national expectations for pupils in mainstream schools but pupils make good progress and achieve well, given their starting points. New arrivals, irrespective of age, make rapid progress in improving their behaviour and social skills, opening up opportunities for them to work harder and with fewer distractions. In recent years, pupils have achieved particularly well in science and made good progress in mathematics. Progress in English though has been weaker, with many pupils failing to achieve their potential in reading and writing, partly because they are not promoted sufficiently strongly across other subjects.

Good teaching contributes enormously to pupils' successes. Teachers confidently manage any signs of misbehaviour, they plan lessons that interest and engage pupils, and they show an exceptionally good understanding of the obstacles pupils face in their learning. Occasionally, teachers are overoptimistic in what can be achieved in a single lesson and, in some instances, the marking of pupils' work does not succeed in creating a lasting record of the progress they are making or how they could do better. This latter point does not unduly impact upon the academic guidance that pupils receive because more formal assessment procedures are very well developed and teachers are in constant discussion with pupils about how well they are doing and where they are going wrong. A personal record in pupils' books of the progress they are making, and of how they could achieve more, is missing. The curriculum is good but weakened by the slightly shorter time pupils spend in class; an issue that has been addressed through formal channels and which will be remedied from September 2009.

Pupils are strongly encouraged to lead healthy lives; they participate wholeheartedly in physical exercise and eat and drink sensibly in school. Their excellent behaviour demonstrates their awareness of how their actions can affect the sense of well-being and safety of others and how, by behaving well, they can contribute more to the community of the school and society as a whole.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and speed up progress in reading and writing by promoting them more across the whole curriculum.
- Generate a better record of pupils' achievements through more thorough marking of their work and better recording of informal feedback to pupils about how they can improve it.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The nature of pupils' difficulties means that they fall well short of expectations set nationally for pupils in mainstream schools. Most pupils enter, and leave, the school at a well-below average standard of learning. Nevertheless, taking into account all the difficulties pupils face in their learning, they make good progress and achieve well. The main achievement in Key Stage 1 is in the way pupils are helped to overcome their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, paving the way for faster academic progress at a later stage. These younger pupils are well taught, which ensures that they achieve well academically as well as in their personal development. Too often though, the English tasks they are set tend to be the same for all of the class rather than being varied to challenge all pupils according to their ability. Pupils in Key Stage 2 achieve well, but more so in science and mathematics than in English, where too many of them last year failed to meet their individual targets. This is partly because the short school day impacts more on the main subjects taught but also because, on the evidence of inspection, the extensive use of worksheets in other subjects, such as geography and history, tends to help pupils avoid writing rather than encouraging them to do so. Reliable assessment data shows that the small numbers of pupils looked after by the local authority make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development and their well-being are outstanding. This is pivotal to the effectiveness of the school and the securing of a much enhanced future for each of its pupils. Attendance is good, exceeding targets for the past five years and steadily improving for the past three. Pupils are keen to attend because they enjoy school and feel safe within it. Much of this is because the school is a settled and safe environment in which pupils thrive. Pupils contribute to this by their excellent behaviour, which testifies to the tremendous strides they make in improving their social and moral awareness. This is helped by staff making it very clear to them what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable conduct; in the words of one pupil who missed his break-time, 'I was making silly noises in class and I know I'm not meant to because it's one of my targets; fair enough'. For many pupils, attending Maplewood has been the first time they have enjoyed school. Many parents have commented on its impact on their children's happiness. Activemark, Sportsmark and Healthy School awards testify to the strong promotion of healthy lifestyles and during the inspection it was very clear that pupils take heed of the advice they are given, making sensible choices about what they ate and drank and playing energetically at break-time. Pupils make a good contribution to the community of the school, for instance, by being instrumental in improving playground facilities, suggesting activities for the annual 'summer school' and making it clear what after-school clubs they would like.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The main reasons pupils make good progress are because they are well taught and they are keen to learn. All of the teaching seen during the inspection was good and school records show

that this is usually the case, with some of it being even better. Teachers show a very good awareness of the difficulties pupils face in managing their emotions and relating to one another. Pupils recognise this and are very trusting that their teachers are there to help them rather than to 'tell them off'. Pupils' attentiveness in lessons greatly enhances their chances of achieving well. Teachers are adept at avoiding confrontation and recognise that, when managing behaviour, 'prevention is better than cure'. They are quick to spot potential problems and by keeping pupils fully occupied in interesting, imaginatively resourced tasks and keeping them working at a good pace, interruptions to learning are very rare. Occasionally, teachers overestimate what can be realistically achieved in a lesson. This means that some objectives are not met and this adversely influences longer-term planning. It also results in some summing-up sessions at the end of lessons being rushed, to the detriment of establishing what has and has not been learned and remembered. In a few classes, the marking of pupils' work does not serve to generate a comprehensive record of pupils' progress or how they could speed it up. The teaching of literacy in English lessons is good but in other subjects, teachers frequently miss opportunities to promote literacy skills. An exception to this was seen in a Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson, where the teacher gave pupils invaluable advice about clues in the spelling of words that could help them remember their meanings.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum serves all pupils equally and well. It meets all requirements and is very well focused on promoting the personal, social and health education of pupils. Numeracy, science and information and communication technology skills are well promoted but literacy skills less so because, other than in English lessons, opportunities for pupils to develop reading and writing skills are occasionally overlooked. A major success of the curriculum is that it manages to re-engage pupils who, on admission, have been perilously close to giving up on learning. This is helped by an exciting and stimulating array of activities. These include many educational visits, a growing variety of break-time clubs, residential experiences and an annual summer school where pupils can spend the first week of their summer holidays participating in activities they would otherwise be unlikely to experience. At present, the time pupils spend in class falls slightly below that which is recommended for primary-aged pupils. This has been recognised and good arrangements have been made to lengthen the school day from September 2009. The process has been complicated by the need to resolve transport issues (as all pupils are ferried to and from school by bus or taxi) but, as an example of a particularly good management decision, the new arrangements are expected to generate a new and enhanced opportunity to extend after-school provision, which has been lacking in the past.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are outstanding. Parents are emphatic in their praise of how well staff look after their children. This is well justified. Managers take enormous care to ensure that pupils are kept safe and well protected at all times. All safeguarding and protection procedures are rigorously followed and legal requirements met. Absence is low compared with similar schools because the school, working closely with other agencies, keeps a very close check on pupils whose non-attendance becomes an issue. Very effective working with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service plays a major part in helping many pupils to address their emotional needs, helped by a dedicated member of staff from that agency

being based within the premises. Individual progress is very carefully monitored through accurate and regular assessment. When progress appears to be stalling, the causes are quickly addressed. For a school of this type, parental involvement is exceptional, meetings are well attended and excellent daily contact is kept through school/home diaries.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Governance is also good but tends to be more supportive than challenging towards its leaders and managers about the school's outcomes. The headteacher, in post for just over a year, has rapidly established a very effective senior leadership team and successfully overcome a tendency to take on too many managerial roles. These roles are increasingly being shared with other senior staff, freeing up more time for the headteacher to gain first-hand evidence of the effectiveness of the school and evaluate the quality of provision. His self-evaluation of the school is accurate and perceptive. Senior staff have risen to the challenge of increased responsibility with relish. A tremendous sense of cooperative working and support prevails and staff at all levels are united in support of the direction the school is taking and playing a full part in helping it to get there. This is why the school has such an outstanding capacity to improve. The excellent school improvement plan is simple and short and focuses astutely on all the main issues, but refers in too general terms to raising standards rather than being more precise, for example, about improving literacy. The school serves the whole of the local authority rather than a local community but it succeeds well in its contribution to society as a whole and in its promotion of community cohesion within the school and further afield. It strongly promotes tolerance and respect towards individuals and groups with whom pupils have little in common and does not tolerate racism in any form. Pupils support many national and international charities enthusiastically.

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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
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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?	2
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?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Maplewood School, Sunderland, SR5 5PA

I inspected your school recently to see how you were getting on. I have been to lots of schools like Maplewood but rarely enjoyed myself so much. A lot of that was down to your excellent behaviour and your willingness to share your thoughts about the school.

You go to a good school and you and your parents know it. You are well taught and, in the main, are making good progress, except in English, where you could be doing better. To help you to do this I have suggested that you should be given more encouragement to read and write in subjects other than English. I have also asked your teachers to make sure they mark your work more thoroughly so that when you look back at your work you can see what you are getting right and where you could do better.

I was particularly impressed by your behaviour. A lot of you have experienced difficulties with your behaviour in the past but it has greatly improved and you are able to see the benefits. It seems that you have learned that, life gets better with better behaviour.

It was good to see how many of you were joining in with the clubs that staff have organised and even better to see how you had helped them to understand what sort of clubs you were interested in.

Of great importance to me was the reassurance that you are being exceptionally well cared for in school and the recognition that you are playing your part by being sensible.

I hope that you respect all the good work that the people who run your school are doing to make sure that it keeps getting better. They are listening to you and have your best interests at heart.

Good luck for the future.

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector