

# The Dales School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122388
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	359241
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 October 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ann Muxworthy

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	36
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs A Moorhouse
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Hugh Steele
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 September 2007
<b>School address</b>	Cowpen Road Blyth Northumberland NE24 4RE
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited six lessons each taught by a different teacher. Discussions were held with staff, governors, pupils and partners of the school. The school's work was observed and policies, curricular guidance, the school improvement plan, headteacher reports, external reports, and pupils' progress were scrutinised. The inspector took into account the findings from the questionnaires submitted by 14 parent and carers, and from questionnaires completed by staff and pupils.

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

- How well do all groups of pupils achieve?
- How well are teachers using assessment to set work matched to individuals' needs?
- How well have leaders been able to sustain improvements during the recent move to the new school site?

## Information about the school

The Dales is a small school for pupils who exhibit a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The main groups of pupils are those with moderate learning difficulties and those with social, emotional and behavioural needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and some pupils have additional communication needs. The Dales was formerly East Hartford School, located in a village in Cramlington, but relocated during the summer vacation 2010 and reopened as The Dales School on 1 September 2010. Pupils attend from across the county of Northumberland and some have experienced significant disruption in their education prior to joining the school. Most pupils are White British and a high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. No pupils speak English as an additional language. The school has successfully gained national awards which include Healthy Schools status and Arts Mark Silver.

**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

The Dales is a good school. The commitment by all staff successfully supports the school's mission statement, 'To meet the individual needs of each pupil in a caring, secure environment where all work together and everyone is valued.' Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the school's caring ethos and show this with comments such as, 'They are a fantastic team dedicated to providing the best they can for each individual child.' The inspection findings wholly agree with this view.

The inspiring leadership of the headteacher is supported well by a leadership team. Together they communicate their enthusiasm, sense of purpose and the school's caring ethos extremely well to pupils, parents and carers. Leaders are committed to driving improvements and have high expectations. This is particularly evident in the recent successfully executed move to a new site which has secured a substantially improved learning environment. Excellent partnerships effectively promote shared expertise, leading to pupils' increased confidence and ability to access their curriculum and participate in a range of social settings. Through careful self-evaluation all staff know the school's strengths and what is needed to secure further improvements. These factors give the school good capacity for continued and sustained improvement.

Outcomes for pupils are good overall. Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points because teachers and other adults understand their needs, and use assessment well to plan and support their next steps in learning. Pupils' progress is monitored, but the information gained is not always shared fully with governors or used effectively enough to increase the rate of progress for individual pupils. The well-planned curriculum, based on learning in practical situations, and excellent care, guidance and support results in an accelerated rate of progress for the majority of pupils.

Children make good progress in their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The needs of learners are met well because of the teaching staff's good understanding of how to encourage children with learning, communication and behavioural needs to develop their skills. A great deal of effort is made to ensure that transition to school life is smooth and involves parents and carers and agencies appropriately. The accommodation is spacious and plans are in hand to ensure that the new site provides enriched opportunities, indoor and outdoor, to meet the needs of a wide range of children's special educational needs and/or disabilities.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring pupils' achievement by:
  - setting clear improvement targets based on outcomes for pupils

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- ensuring provision mapping and tracking are ambitious for pupils and that they know and understand their targets.
- making performance data accessible to governors to develop their understanding.
- Further develop the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by completing improvements in the indoor and outdoor environments in order to extend active learning.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils enjoy their learning and their behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils make good progress when measured against their individual starting points. The achievement of boys and girls is good, as is the achievement of those pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. Progress is nearly always better than might be expected, given pupils' learning difficulties or in comparison with children with similar needs.

Pupils appreciate the support given by adults and respond well when encouraged to be independent. For instance, pupils in Key Stage 2 worked well using a range of computer programmes to extend their individual understanding of phonics. Pupils meet challenging targets in their individual education plans. They do particularly well in developing their social, emotional and behavioural skills. This supports greater engagement in activities and acceptance of challenge to improve their learning. By the time pupils transfer to secondary school they have had good opportunities to apply their skills and abilities in a range of situations.

Pupils are happy and friendly towards each other and staff. The rare incidents of challenging behaviour that may interrupt learning are managed very effectively through the school's thoughtful and effective approach. Consequently, any disruption is minimal. Pupils gain valuable knowledge and skills to help them stay safe. These include road safety when on their trips into the community and the wider aspects of personal safety through the good personal, social and health education programme. Parents and carers strongly agree that their children feel happy and safe at school.

Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, through the school's well planned programme of sports and extra-curricular activities. Pupils across the school have a strong sense of school community. Pupils' views led to the formation of a girls' dance group and a successful performance. They actively raise funds for charities and engage well with local schools on team sporting activities. Good attendance levels and their high level of interest to be involved in creative and practical experiences prepare them well for the next stage in their education. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show the values of caring and friendship. For example, older pupils are keen to mentor new younger pupils. A wide range of visits and visitors to school contribute to pupils' good cultural development.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Teaching and management of pupils' behaviour is consistently effective in ensuring pupils are engaged and motivated to learn. Teaching assistants make consistently strong contributions to teaching and learning through, for instance, helping pupils to practise skills in individual programmes. Teachers and teaching assistants use a broad range of assessment well to assess and extend pupils' learning. However, pupils do not always know their targets or what to do to reach them. A provision-mapping tool is supporting assessment and providing targeted interventions for pupils; however, it needs to work alongside tracking systems to ensure that pupils' progress is as ambitious as possible.

In good lessons, teachers apply their specialist skills and knowledge to motivate and challenge pupils to achieve their best. The routine use of information and communication technology, practical activities and well-prepared classroom resources provides engaging opportunities for learning.

The curriculum provides real and exciting experiences that unlock pupils' imaginations. It positively promotes self-esteem and places a strong emphasis on basic skills, which contributes to pupils' good development and well-being. Through highly effective partnerships, expertise in arts and extra-curricular clubs, pupils can share experiences in

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sports, healthy living and arts and gain a good understanding of working life through their enterprise activities.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school has created a friendly, supportive setting that successfully promotes learning and enjoyment equally. Transition is extremely well supported through excellent partnerships and thoughtful preparation. The school has been proactive in ensuring that pupils gain access to an excellent range of therapy provision. Highly effective working partnerships between staff, parents and carers and agencies ensures the well-being of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a strong vision for school improvement, which is embraced well by the leadership team. Leaders have improved provision effectively by successfully acquiring a new site to provide specialist classrooms and sensory facilities which can now improve the learning outcomes for pupils. Using a team approach, middle leaders have led priorities for improvement efficiently. Examples include communication, partnership with parents and carers, and creative arts. Staff are proud to be part of the school, have high expectations and understand how they can contribute to developments. The use of subject specialists and partners supports quality teaching, informed monitoring and good achievement for most pupils.

The promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are at the heart of the school's work. Every effort is made to ensure that all pupils are able to succeed, regardless of their particular needs. The school's self-evaluation is generally accurate. However, the school does not present its analysis of pupils' performance and targets as well as it might to support governors' monitoring. Governors have been very supportive of the new vision for the school and the move to its new premises, ensuring finances were identified and deployed well. The governing body includes a good range of skills and expertise and fulfils its duties well in holding the school to account.

School leaders act responsibly in regard to the safety of pupils and staff. Careful and effective risk assessments help keep accidents to a minimum. Outstanding partnerships with health professionals, local schools and the wider community make an excellent contribution to the achievements and well-being of pupils. Highly positive relationships with parents and carers ensure effective support for pupils and their families. The school is a very harmonious community which successfully increases understanding of its wider community, both within Northumberland and beyond. Staff and resources are well deployed to support pupils' needs and the school offers good value for money.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Good leadership and management ensure that the strong staff team successfully make this first stage of school a good start for the children. Progress in learning for the youngest children is good. Children learn well because they are well cared for and have individualised learning programmes that are matched appropriately to their needs. Constant quality interactions assist in the development of language, communication skills and understanding. The indoor and outdoor environments are undergoing refurbishment; however, they need to be completed to ensure increased opportunities for learning. Adults are good role models for children. Children are valued, as are their opinions, and are encouraged to make choices. The strong relationships enhance good social development and staff diligence secures safe practices.

Parents and carers are involved from an early stage in transition into the school and children are grouped to ensure seamless transition through to Key Stage 1. Accurate and precise assessments are undertaken and are used well to plan learning experiences.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation	2



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Stage	
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## Views of parents and carers

A good proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Those who did were extremely positive of the school's provision and the outcomes it achieves. The quality of leadership and teaching, pupils' enjoyment of school and feeling safe were rated particularly highly. One comment stated, 'My son has come on leaps and bounds. It is a pupil and parent focused school and I am glad my son goes.'

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Dales 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 inspector received 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 36 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	71	4	29	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	86	2	14	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	7	50	6	43	1	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	50	6	43	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	71	3	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	64	5	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	64	5	36	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)	8	57	6	43	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	64	5	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	64	4	29	1	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	64	4	29	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	86	2	14	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



13 October 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of The Dales School, Blyth, NE24 4RE**

Thank you so much for being so friendly and helpful when I inspected your school. I enjoyed meeting you and thoroughly enjoyed seeing your lessons and other activities. Seeing you help other children when you were playing showed me you knew it was good to make friends. You have been very active doing lots of sport and meeting other children from other schools.

You told me how happy you are in school and I can see why. I found that The Dales is a good school. This is because your headteacher, staff and governors work extremely hard to make sure your school is the best it can be. I have asked your governors to find out more about how well you are doing. You make good progress and become confident young people; you are right to care for your school. I was delighted with the many exciting activities you get to do in and out of school. Being a mentor to younger children shows you are very caring. You are making good progress in your lessons. Because of this, we have asked your teachers to find more ways to let you know how close you are to making your targets. I have also said I would like the young children in your school to move into their new classrooms and playground as soon as possible to enjoy their play and learning.

I also found out that your school takes excellent care of you and helps you make friends and get on together. I was particularly impressed with how you get to visit Beadnell and have fun. You are good at having ideas to raise money and this is helping you to think of others and preparing you for when you leave school. I wish you continued success.

Yours sincerely

Ms Ann Muxworthy

Lead inspector

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