

The Dales School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121771
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	359078
Inspection dates	14–15 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Thomas

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Chubb
Headteacher	Mrs Hanne Barton
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2008
School address	Morton-on-Swale Northallerton North Yorkshire DL7 9QW
Telephone number	01609 772932
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed eight lessons taught by seven teachers and a higher-level teaching assistant. Meetings were held with pupils, teaching staff, members of the governing body, and senior members of staff in a partnership secondary school. The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at teachers' planning for lessons, leaders' development plans and examples of pupils' work. They also took into account the views of 16 parents and carers who returned questionnaires to the inspection team.

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

- The progress pupils make in developing their mathematical, English and social skills across all areas of the provision.
- How well the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The progress made by different groups of pupils.
- How well the governing body supports the school's work.

Information about the school

The Dales School is a small special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. In addition the sixth form caters for some students with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, none of whom are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Fewer pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals than is typical for a school of this kind. A significant number of pupils are considered to be in public care because of the respite provision made for their families. The school provides outreach support to local mainstream schools. This helps them to address the learning needs of pupils with severe and complex needs, including communication difficulties. The school has gained the following awards: Investors in People, Healthy School status, Activemark, Sportsmark and the Inclusion Quality Mark. Since September 2010 it has Specialist School status for cognition and learning.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Dales school is an outstanding school which well deserves its excellent reputation with parents, carers and the community. Parents' and carers' views are reflected in the typical comment, 'the school offers my child a fantastic learning experience'. The headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and they support staff in the delivery of high quality provision. Self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and rigorous, and the findings are acted upon to outstanding effect. The school is excellent at supporting pupils' diverse needs and, as a result, the significant barriers to learning that all pupils have, are minimised. Since the last inspection, the school has made outstanding progress in many areas. For example, the school has introduced a very effective system for tracking pupils' small steps of progress. The new multi-sensory room has increased pupils' access to an interactive curriculum. These improvements demonstrate an excellent capacity to improve further.

Pupils in the main school, Early Years Foundation Stage and sixth form all make outstanding progress in their personal development and grow in confidence as they move through school. This is the result of excellent care, guidance and support which give pupils' welfare the highest priority. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and many understand how to stay healthy. Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe. Excellent transition arrangements ensure pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education or life.

Outstanding teaching is based on thorough and reliable assessment of pupils' learning needs. Progress for all groups of pupils is excellent. A detailed assessment system has been introduced since the last inspection. This enables excellent analysis of data and ensures that monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress is highly effective. Teaching assistants provide excellent support in lessons so all are fully involved. The exceptional curriculum has continued to improve since the last inspection with new partnerships further enriching learning. Attendance is above average despite the vulnerability and complex medical needs of many pupils. This reflects their enjoyment of school, and the excellent relationships with school staff.

Senior managers are highly effective in moving the school forward through meticulous self-evaluation. The governing body ensures safeguarding policies and procedures are securely in place. It monitors most aspects of the school's work well. Governors have recently developed their role in holding senior managers to account for provision in school. The impact of these changes is yet to be evaluated. Through its work with schools in the local community and abroad, the school has ensured pupils have a good understanding of life in a multi-ethnic society.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of this current academic year, evaluate the impact of the school's new system for ensuring that the governing body holds school leaders to account.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

When pupils join the school, the levels at which they are working are typically very much lower than those expected for their age. This is also the case for those pupils who join the school in other years. Although overall attainment is still lower than average by the end of Year 11, many pupils have made excellent progress from their individual starting points. Many overcome severe barriers to their learning and achievement is outstanding.

Pupils joining the school settle quickly and respond positively to their individual learning programmes. These enable pupils to work consistently and achieve well in all areas of the curriculum. This was seen in an outstanding literacy lesson. Because of the skillful support from staff, pupils with exceptionally high levels of need were all able to participate and enjoy exploring sounds and actions through song. As a result they all concentrated on the tasks, fascinated by the sounds around them, demonstrating obvious pleasure and enjoyment. Given the nature of these pupils' learning needs, this was impressive.

All groups of pupils, including those with profound and multiple learning needs and pupils who are looked after by the local authority, make excellent progress. This is because learning environments are specifically designed to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. For example, classrooms, resources and equipment are bright, colourful and stimulating for pupils with profound and multiple learning needs. Sign language and switch communication aids are used very effectively to promote the inclusion of all pupils. Staff set inspirational targets for pupils. These, coupled with a determination that all should achieve their very best ensure that pupils in all years make outstanding progress.

Pupils feel safe because they know staff are supportive and help them at all times. They clearly enjoy school. A typical comment is that, 'this school is the best ever'. Many pupils recognise the importance of making healthy food choices, for example, choosing fruit to eat at snack time and they have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Pupils enjoy the many different physical activities offered through the school's specialist physical education partnership and appreciate the part this plays in a healthy lifestyle. The school offers many and varied learning opportunities for pupils to work with their peers in other schools and colleges. As a result, pupils leave with a wide range of accreditations and life experiences and are exceptionally well prepared for the next phase in their education. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community both within and outside school by listening to and appreciating the needs of others. For example, older pupils run a café in school serving home-made scones and drinks, which is regularly attended by members of the local community. Pupils' impressive spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen in the way in which they react to each other and take care of the environment.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are very effective in using assessment information to set ambitious targets for pupils. Information and communication technology is used exceptionally well to support pupils' learning and promote their independence. Lesson planning is extremely thorough and great attention is given to ensuring work is modified to meet the different needs of pupils. Marking of pupils' work ensures they are aware of what is needed to improve. Support staff are well trained and work very closely with teachers to support pupils' learning very effectively.

The curriculum is exceptionally well organised and is highly personalised to meet the needs of individual learners. It is imaginatively enhanced by many visits and activities away from the classroom. Educational visits help develop pupils' independence. A forest school helps to develop team building skills and offers pupils a range of outdoor experiences. One pupil described this as, 'muddy but fun'.

As a result of excellent quality care, guidance and support, pupils feel there is always someone who will listen and help. A careful and thorough assessment is undertaken when pupils arrive at the school, which is then used to target support effectively. Pupils who are vulnerable due to their circumstances are exceptionally well supported and this is helped by the excellent links with many outside agencies. Attendance is good, despite many

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pupils' highly complex medical needs. It continues to improve year on year as a result of careful monitoring by school staff and the building up of strong relationships with parents and carers. Transition arrangements are securely in place and pupils are exceptionally well prepared for moving to the next phase in their education or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The visionary leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders is moving the school forward exceptionally well and ensuring excellent outcomes for pupils. This, coupled with exciting partnerships forged with outside agencies, is most effectively driving improvement further. The governing body provides good management and has implemented good quality procedures to ensure the health and well-being of all pupils. They offer effective support to the school and challenge to senior leaders in most aspects of the school's work. The impact of recent changes to improve the structure of the governing body by developing clear roles and responsibilities, especially linked to becoming more challenging, has yet to be evaluated. Robust procedures ensure all safeguarding requirements are met and that practice is of a good standard. The strength and quality of these procedures mean that safeguarding issues are dealt with effectively by senior leaders. Leaders and managers have ensured that the school is a highly inclusive community. Systems to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination within school are excellent. No stone is left unturned to help pupils to overcome barriers to their learning and to ensure they make as much progress as possible.

Community cohesion is effectively promoted. Leaders have built highly successful links which benefit pupils and the local community. The school readily shares its expertise through partnerships with local schools. Further partnerships are now being developed through the school's recently acquired specialist school status. Direct links to schools within the global community are well established. Good links with local schools whose pupils are from different communities help to improve and develop pupils' understanding of life in a multi-ethnic society. The school is very successful at engaging parents and carers. School staff ensure they are kept well informed about their child's successes. School supports pupils' families exceptionally well by encouraging children and their siblings to attend events at each other's schools. As a result, parents and carers are highly appreciative of the ongoing work of the school, which is carried out on a well controlled budget, providing excellent value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Staff working within the Early Years Foundation Stage develop strong links with children's families before they start school. As a result, all children get off to an outstanding start. They settle into their routines quickly because of the exceptionally high quality of care, guidance and support for their personal and social development. They clearly feel safe and secure in the setting. Excellent partnerships with the children's therapy team ensure that children are very well supported. Highly inclusive and well supported partnerships with local primary schools ensure children access a wide range of relevant and enjoyable learning experiences in a range of stimulating environments.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader does everything in her power to ensure children access a high quality learning environment no matter what their physical and medical needs. Staff are highly committed to ensuring children have opportunities to experience outdoor play which mirrors indoor learning.

As a result of excellent teaching and highly effective support from staff children make outstanding progress despite their high level of need. Tasks are very well adapted to children's ages and abilities because staff use assessment information effectively to plan learning experiences. Each child's progress is charted well through meticulous records which are shared with parents and carers. Evaluation is excellent and clearly identifies what the setting needs to do to improve.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

Students aged from 14 to 19 benefit from high quality personalised learning programmes, individually designed to meet their interests and ability. Because of very strong links with a local mainstream college they have access to a wide range of learning opportunities outside school. This has a strong impact on developing their personal skills and self-confidence. As a result, pupils greatly enjoy their learning. Their behaviour is very good and their attendance is excellent despite their medical needs. As a result of sensitive teaching, they make excellent progress in developing enterprise and basic skills as well as in tasks which help them adjust to adult life. This results in all students gaining accreditations at the end of their courses and prepares them exceptionally well for the next phase in their education or training. The school's senior leadership manages teachers and other staff particularly well. The sixth form coordinator works effectively to develop enterprise schemes which help students gain an understanding of the world of work. Excellent transition planning leads to students being exceptionally well prepared for life after school. They make excellent progress in all aspects of their personal development. They mature in confidence and in their ability to help plan and carry out a range of activities.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

Sixteen responses were received by the inspection team from parents and carers, representing approximately one third of the school population. The vast majority of questionnaires were wholly positive and supported the work of the school. This matched the views of the inspection team.

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 inspection team received 16 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 48 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	63	6	38	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	69	5	31	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	63	5	31	1	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	44	8	50	1	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	75	4	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	63	6	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	69	5	31	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)	12	75	4	25	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	69	4	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	56	5	31	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	50	7	44	1	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	44	7	44	2	13	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	81	3	19	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.



16 December 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Dales School, Northallerton, DL7 9QW

Thank you very much for making the inspectors so welcome when we inspected your school. It was lovely to meet you and to hear how much you enjoy school. A special thank you to all of you who spent time talking with us.

We appreciate how much you all love coming to school and agree with those of you who told us that you think your school is excellent. These are some of the things we think are especially good.

- The friendly and polite welcome you all give to visitors.
- The way in which staff care for you so well and help you to make future choices.
- The excellent progress you all make in lessons.
- The outstanding way your teachers help you to learn.
- The way you help the local community by making excellent scones to sell in the Scone Shop café.

Because your school is so good we have only asked for one thing to make it even better:

- We have asked your school governors to make sure they help and advise the school as much as they can.

Thank you once again for making us so welcome and we hope you all had a happy Christmas.

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas

Lead inspector

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