

The Dales School

Morton-on-Swale, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL7 9QW

Inspection dates

2 to 3 April 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have created a culture of high expectations where learning is personalised, and there is an emphasis on working in partnership with parents and other agencies.
- The headteacher's evaluation of the school's effectiveness is detailed and accurate. This has helped leaders quickly identify the school's strengths and areas for development.
- Pupils make strong progress because the curriculum in the lower school is well designed to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties. There is an emphasis on understanding and overcoming the barriers to learning that each pupil experiences.
- The detailed sixth-form curriculum and careers education programme help students develop their independence skills so that they are well prepared for the next steps after school. However, leaders understand that the sixth-form curriculum needs to further develop to meet the needs of all students.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff and leaders respond promptly when concerns are raised. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils are protected. Pupils say that they feel safe.
- Pupils make strong progress because staff know them well and ensure that teaching is well matched to each pupil's need. Staff accurately record and monitor pupils' progress using the school's detailed assessment system.
- Leaders collect and check a range of information to ensure that pupils are making secure progress. However, leaders do not effectively analyse information about pupils' behaviour to ensure that they make changes to the curriculum or the support provided for pupils.
- Governors are ambitious for the school. They value the headteacher's dedicated leadership and the quality of the information provided by leaders. Governors value the school's work with the department for education, and other special schools, to develop assessment systems for pupils with special educational needs.
- Parents have confidence in the headteacher and strongly support the changes that she has made since joining the school. They say that their views are listened to, and that they are partners with staff in their child's education.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the information collected about pupils' behaviour and well-being is recorded precisely and analysed in detail to enable leaders to respond strategically
 - ensuring that the school website meets the publication requirements from the department for education.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that planned changes to the sixth-form curriculum and accreditation are implemented quickly
 - ensuring that staff consistently use signing and symbols to enable all pupils to make strong progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's vision that the school should work in strong partnership with parents and carers is shared by staff and governors. This has resulted in staff developing effective working relationships with parents and carers, and parents having confidence in the headteacher and their child's class team.
- Leaders have quickly and accurately evaluated the school's effectiveness and identified the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders recognised that the curriculum in the primary and secondary departments needed further development to ensure that the content and structure was closely matched to the needs of pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties. Leaders quickly and successfully made these changes, which resulted in the development of separate curriculum pathways and well-designed programmes of studies for pupils with different starting points.
- Leaders identified that the curriculum in the sixth form, and the range of accredited courses, needed to be developed. Leaders' plans to make these changes have been hampered by unforeseen staff changes. Although leaders have made some improvements to the sixth-form curriculum, they have not made all the changes required, or as quickly as planned. Leaders understand that more needs to be done quickly to ensure that the sixth-form curriculum closely matches the needs of all students.
- Leaders provide strong support to staff who are ambitious and want to improve their effectiveness. This is because the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has created a culture of high expectations. Staff say that they are empowered to be innovative. Teachers share good practice to improve the outcomes for all pupils.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have developed an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching through regular monitoring and the checking of pupils' progress, using the school's detailed assessment system. Leaders use the information that they collect from lesson observations to identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Leaders use this information to develop the staff training programme and leaders quickly check that training has had the intended impact.
- Leaders analyse in detail the information that they collect about the progress of pupils. They compare the progress of individuals and groups of pupils to the overall progress of all pupils. Where pupils are not making secure progress, leaders intervene quickly, working with staff to check that learning objectives are appropriate, and that teachers' assessments are accurate.
- The headteacher has successfully developed the role and effectiveness of middle leaders. Middle leaders coordinate the work of staff teams to tackle priorities in the school improvement plan. Middle leaders are well supported by senior leaders. They say that they feel empowered and are enthusiastic about the opportunity to take responsibility for an aspect of school improvement, as well as contributing to the day-to-day management of the school.

- Staff say that they are proud to work at the school and report that the school has continued to improve since the last inspection. Staff have confidence in the headteacher and senior leaders. They say that they are well supported and that leaders are considerate of their well-being. This was evidenced in changes that leaders made to the staff development programme following feedback from staff.
- Leaders understand that the attendance of some pupils is affected by their complex health needs. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and those in receipt of pupil premium, is better than those who are not disadvantaged. Leaders work effectively with parents, the local authority and other agencies to encourage good attendance, and secure appropriate support for those pupils who are unable to attend school.
- Leaders work in partnership with other special schools in the local area to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments and to ensure that progress targets are sufficiently challenging. Leaders also work with the department for education, and similar special schools nationally, to share the school's innovative work on assessment and to support the government's work on the development of assessment systems for pupils with complex special educational needs.
- Parents highly value the work of the school and the leadership of the headteacher. The parents who spoke to an inspector said that their child was safe, well cared for and that they were making good progress. They said that the headteacher listens to their views, that staff are approachable, and that parents are valued as partners in their child's education. One parent spoke for others when she said that, 'The staff don't just care for your child, they care for you.' Another parent added that, 'The staff go above and beyond.'
- Leaders have reviewed the structure and content of the school website. However, when checked by an inspector, the website did not meet the publication requirements of the department for education.

Governance of the school

- Governors are motivated, strongly ambitious for the school and proud of the school's work with the department for education to share good practice about systems to assess and track pupils' progress. Governors value the dedicated leadership of the headteacher. They are aware of the impact that her leadership has had on improving the school's effectiveness, and in developing effective partnerships with parents and carers.
- As a result of leaders' detailed self-evaluation, the headteacher's reports and governors' regular focused visits to school, governors are well informed about the school's strengths and the priorities for improvement. This enables governors to effectively challenge the headteacher about the school's performance, for example about improving pupils' outcomes and attendance.
- Governors are aware of the challenges that leaders have faced in developing the curriculum and accreditation in the sixth form. They understand that rapid progress now needs to be made to ensure that the sixth-form curriculum accurately meets the needs of all students.
- As a result of recent changes in the membership of the governing body, governors

reviewed their skills and have recruited new members to ensure that they have a good range of knowledge, skills and experience to continue to be effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is effective because leaders have created a strong child-centred culture, and staff training is detailed and effective. Staff respond promptly when they have a concern about a pupil's safety or well-being.
- When leaders receive safeguarding concerns, they take prompt action, effectively working with other agencies to protect vulnerable children. Leaders challenge other agencies when they consider that the support for pupils and their families could be improved.
- The arrangements for supervising pupils as they arrive and leave school are safe and well designed. Strong systems are in place to check the arrangements for school visits and to ensure that pupils' medical needs are effectively met when they are on visits in the community.
- Leaders make appropriate recruitment checks on staff, maintain accurate records and regularly audit the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders and governors undertake safer recruitment training and leaders regularly provide governors with detailed safeguarding reports.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There is a strong personalised approach throughout the curriculum and staff know the needs of each pupil exceptionally well. This is because staff use the school's detailed assessment system to record pupils' individual starting points and the small steps in each pupil's progress. As a result, teaching is personalised and is closely matched to pupils' academic and physical needs.
- In most lessons, teachers choose activities that ensure that learning activities closely match the desired outcomes in pupils' education health and care plans, and that the information collected about each pupil's progress is regularly reviewed.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the work of the school and the progress that pupils make. Senior teaching assistants have whole-school responsibilities and effectively lead school improvement priorities.
- Staff collect evidence in each lesson and add this to classroom 'wow-boards'. Teachers and support staff regularly check each pupil's progress, and they review learning outcomes in the light of the evidence collected. Leaders have recently introduced a system to enable staff and parents to share photographic evidence. Parents value the opportunity to see what their child has learned at school, and staff use the information provided by parents to deepen their understanding of pupils' progress outside of school.
- Where learning is most effective, staff use symbols and signing to ensure that pupils are able to understand their learning objectives and receive immediate feedback about their work and learning. However, staff do not use signing and symbols consistently in

all lessons. As a result, some pupils do not make secure progress as they do not understand what they need to do or receive effective feedback that helps them learn.

- Most staff use effective questions to check and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. This was seen in a play activity in a primary class where pupils were using a see-saw. A member of staff used well-chosen questions to check and develop pupils' understanding of balance and weight.
- Pupils are encouraged to be independent. For example, a sixth-form student with complex needs was responsible for taking the scones and flapjacks baked in a cookery lesson to the school café. In the café, students learn to take customers' orders using symbol supported worksheets, use their communication skills, practise their number skills and use money. In morning registration lessons, pupils choose what they would like for lunch. Sixth-form students are responsible for collecting this information from each class and taking it to the school office.
- Pupils with delayed communication skills use information technology to support their learning. A sixth-form student used specialist software on a computer tablet to communicate with visitors and take orders in the school café. Pupils with complex needs use specialist switches to make choices and communicate with staff.
- Pupils are involved in a wide range of activities in the local community to reinforce learning. For example, a group of pupils visited a local planetarium as part of a science project. Sixth-form students regularly visit the local community to reinforce learning and develop their practical skills. For example, each week students visit a local nature reserve as part of the school's 'forest schools' programme. Other sixth-form students visit a nearby short break centre to practise their independence skills, such as dusting, cleaning windows and making beds. Other students run a weekly staff lunch club, making and selling staff meals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff understand the needs of individual pupils extremely well. The headteacher has created a culture where staff understand that pupils' physical and emotional well-being are important foundations to their educational progress.
- There are respectful relationships between pupils and staff. Opportunities are sought for pupils to make choices about the things that affect them, for example choosing an activity or what they will have for lunch.
- Pupils, including those who are new to school, told inspectors that they feel safe when they are in school, there is no bullying and that they know who to talk to if they have any concerns.
- Pupils are taught about healthy eating and the importance of making choices that maintain their good health. For example, a sixth-form student was able to describe foods that she should eat, and those to avoid, to manage her health needs.
- Staff create regular opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils come together at the end of each afternoon to

celebrate birthdays, and to hear about the work of class groups and the achievements of other pupils. This activity provides an opportunity for pupils to have a period of quiet reflection at the end of the school day. As a result, pupils leave school calm and settled.

- Staff receive specialist training to ensure that they effectively support pupils with complex health needs. Parents say that staff respond quickly and effectively to information that they provide about their child's well-being. One parent said that she was confident that when she gave information about her child to one member of the class team, the other members of the team would be quickly informed and would adapt the support provided, accordingly.
- The school council has an active voice in the running of the school. Students in the sixth form represent pupils in the primary and secondary departments. Members of the school council collect ideas from classes in lower school and provide feedback after meetings. The school council have been influential in working with leaders to develop lunchtime clubs and extra-curricular activities.
- Sixth-form pupils say that they feel well prepared to leave school and move to continuing education, training or employment. The school's well-designed careers education programme effectively supports students to make decisions about the next steps after school. This programme, and the annual 'passport to the future' event, are highly valued by parents in helping them understand the choices that are available for their son or daughter when they leave school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well supported in lessons, and they demonstrate positive attitudes to learning because teachers make lessons fun and learning enjoyable.
- Pupils are well behaved as they move around school. They are polite, and they enjoy respectful relationships with one another and with staff.
- Detailed behaviour support plans describe the additional help that pupils with complex needs require. Plans include information about the strategies to support individual pupils, and they are regularly reviewed by staff and parents, with support from a local authority officer.
- Leaders emphasise the importance of working with pupils to de-escalate their behaviour. As a result, there are very few incidents where staff need to physically intervene to keep pupils safe. On the few occasions when staff do need to physically support a pupil, a detailed record of the incident is prepared and promptly passed to leaders.
- Leaders check and securely store the detailed records of incidents when staff raise a 'cause for concern'. Where appropriate, leaders take prompt and decisive action to keep pupils safe and ensure that staff work effectively with other agencies.
- Leaders secure good outcomes for individual pupils when concerns are raised. However, they do not effectively analyse and evaluate the information that they collect to establish whether there are patterns evident, or changes that could be made to the

curriculum to improve the support provided for pupils.

- Leaders understand that their ability to effectively analyse the information on incident reports is hampered by the system used to record and store information. As a result, leaders are planning to introduce an electronic system which will enable the quick and detailed analysis of this information.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school with a wide range of starting points. The pupils who join the primary and secondary departments have complex and profound needs. Some of the older pupils who join the school's sixth-form have moderate learning difficulties. Many pupils have additional needs such as complex health conditions or autism. All pupils have an educational health and care plan.
- As a result of the information shared by parents and other professionals when pupils start school, and by using the school's detailed assessment system, teachers quickly and accurately judge each pupil's starting point.
- Staff know pupils well and understand the barriers to their learning. Teaching is personalised, and learning outcomes are closely matched to pupils' starting points and the desired outcomes in their education, health and care plan. As a result of detailed assessments, personalised planning and regular assessments, pupils make strong progress.
- Leaders analyse assessment and progress information in detail. They measure the progress of individuals and groups of pupils against the whole-school data and compare the progress of groups from year-to-year. Leaders moderate the accuracy of teachers' assessment judgements, working with staff from similar special schools, and they check that targets are rigorous and challenging.
- The progress and achievements of sixth-form students are recorded through a range of externally accredited courses. All sixth-form students complete either the ASDAN personal and social development course, or personal progress course, and the Duke of Edinburgh award, including a residential activity. Leaders understand that they need to extend the use of the school's assessment system into the sixth form and increase the range of accredited courses to ensure that the sixth-form programmes of study more accurately match the needs of all students.
- Leaders have ensured that additional funding is used effectively to improve pupil outcomes. Funding has been used to support after-school activities, such as the military kids club, to develop the curriculum, support staff training and to purchase specialist equipment and resources to improve pupils' access to the curriculum. As a result, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is as strong, and sometimes stronger, than those who are not disadvantaged.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- At the end of key stage 4, pupils continue to attend school and join the school sixth-form. In addition, some pupils with less complex special educational needs from a local special school and, at times, others from a local mainstream school, join the school's sixth-form. As a result, the sixth-form is largest part of the school with nearly half the

pupils on the school roll attending the sixth-form.

- Leaders' vision is that the sixth-form curriculum should promote students' independence and effectively prepare pupils for life after school. Activities in the sixth-form are well chosen to develop students' practical independence skills.
- Teaching is good. Teachers help students develop their independence skills through well-chosen activities which are relevant and purposeful. For example, a group of sixth-form students used their cookery skills to prepare scones and flapjacks to sell in the school's community café. Other sixth-form students ran the community café using their communication, number and literacy skills to take customers' orders and payments.
- Staff help students understand their desired learning outcomes through the use of symbols and signing. Staff use 'now and next' symbol timetables to help students with complex needs understand the structure of lessons and the school day.
- As part of a whole-school curriculum review, leaders reviewed the sixth-form curriculum and have introduced pathways for pupils with different starting points. However, leaders' capacity to implement all the intended changes have been hampered by unforeseen personnel changes. Leaders have effectively responded to these changes and understand that more needs to be done quickly to ensure that the sixth-form curriculum closely matches the needs of all students.

School details

Unique reference number	121771
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	10067142

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 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Chubb
Headteacher	Ann-Marie Ellis
Telephone number	01609 772 932
Website	www.thedalesschool.org
Email address	office@thedalesschool.org
Date of previous inspection	26 June 2018

Information about this school

- All pupils at The Dales School have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have severe or profound multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have one or more additional needs such as autism spectrum disorders, medical needs, sensory impairments and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Some students with moderate learning difficulties join the school from other schools in order to take part in the sixth-form programmes of study.
- Nearly half the pupils who attend the school are in the sixth form. There is one early years pupil; most of the other pupils are in key stages 1 and 2. There are few pupils in key stages 3 and 4.

- Pupils who attend the school come from a large catchment area.
- The school has a lower-than-average proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors, accompanied by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, observed a variety of lessons across the school. Inspectors spoke to pupils, teachers and teaching assistants during their visits to classrooms.
- Inspectors met the headteacher and the senior leadership team to discuss the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, and information about the curriculum, safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and the use of additional funding. An inspector met members of the school's middle leadership group.
- Inspectors checked policies and information about the school before and during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work, discussed pupils' progress with the senior leaders and checked pupils' files and education, health and care plans.
- An inspector observed pupils arriving at school and met representatives of the school council.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to take them into account. Inspectors considered two additional free-text comments and an inspector held a meeting with five parents.
- An inspector met two governors and held a meeting with a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector considered the views of 43 staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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