

# Danecourt School

Hotel Road, Gillingham, Kent ME8 6AA

## Inspection dates

5–6 June 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early Years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher has taken bold steps to improve the school since her appointment. She demonstrates clear and effective leadership and is well supported by the staff.
- Governors have radically improved the ways in which they work. As a result, they are now very knowledgeable about the school and hold leaders to account well.
- The vast majority of pupils make strong progress across all key stages. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- Teaching is good overall as staff are committed to improve their practice.
- A few pupils with more complex needs make less progress than others because the curriculum they study does not fully meet their needs.
- Middle leaders are keen to do well but do not yet have the skills to transform teaching in their subjects.
- The school receives judicious and finely targeted support from the Barnsole Primary Trust. As a result, the school continues to improve.
- Pupils relish coming to school and are very proud of their work. They work well together and are keen to share, take turns and support each other.
- Children enter the early years with starting points that are typically very low for their age. They receive very effective support from staff, who have a deep understanding of the children's needs, and make excellent progress.
- The curriculum is lively and exciting. Pupils make the most of the many opportunities to learn new skills.
- Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities, including riding their bikes, trampolining and swimming.
- Leaders work very effectively with other schools and specialist support services. As a result, pupils with complex problems are well catered for.
- Teaching assistants and other specialist staff make an incisive contribution to the life of the school. Consequently, pupils receive skilful and well-judged support.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school because it is a happy place where pupils thrive.

## **Full report**

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

- Continue to modify the curriculum as more pupils with complex learning difficulties join the school.
- Refine the support for leaders new to their roles by improving how they share the most effective practice to best meet the needs of pupils with the most significant barriers.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has galvanised the school since her appointment. Alongside her senior leaders, she is determined that the school provides an education that transforms the lives of the pupils who attend.
- Leaders evaluate their work closely and regularly. They use assessment information very effectively to prioritise areas that require further attention and they intervene quickly when pupils make less progress than expected.
- Leaders have reset their expectations for teaching. They have increased the rigour and depth of the systems to reward pay and performance. Leaders regularly demonstrate effective teaching so that all staff are aware of what is expected. Consequently, teaching is increasingly consistent and staff are more confident about sharing best practice.
- Middle leaders are not fully confident about their roles in raising standards to the highest level. They are developing a better understanding of their responsibilities as a result of the changes to their role following a leadership restructure. However, these leaders have yet to make a significant impact on the teaching in the areas in which they lead.
- All staff feel very well supported and enjoy working in the school. Teaching assistants particularly appreciate the very extensive training and support they receive. As a result, they provide very high-quality support in lessons. This is especially the case with those pupils who have more complex needs.
- Leaders are increasingly working with local outstanding providers to meet the requirements of the growing numbers of pupils with more complex needs. As a result, the school is much more open to revising its curriculum to meet the higher levels of need. However, some of this work is at an early stage and yet to make an impact.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well so that most of these pupils make similar progress to that of their peers. There is an extensive support programme for disadvantaged pupils that is individually tailored to match their needs. Leaders keep a close eye on which strategies are the most effective and adjust their approaches accordingly. The innovative use of funding to support horse riding, a morning transition club and specialist resources has made a significant impact on the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders make excellent use of the additional funding for sports to provide a wide range of experiences for all pupils. Leaders have promoted competitive sports as well as key life skills such as swimming. Pupils report how much they liked trampolining, climbing and riding their bikes.
- The curriculum is lively and exciting. Teachers make good use of pupils' interests to plan stimulating topics. Leaders have developed the outdoor areas adroitly so that pupils have the opportunity to learn key concepts in a different setting and outside the formal classroom. There is an extensive range of visits and trips that help pupils broaden their understanding of modern life in Britain. However, leaders recognise that the curriculum needs further review to best meet the needs of the pupils with the most

complex needs.

- The school's ethos is to ensure that every pupil is 'valued, respected, safe and successful'. Leaders tirelessly promote these values to staff, parents and pupils. Consequently, the school is a warm and welcoming environment where pupils blossom and flourish.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and its work. They comment effusively about the nurture and care their children receive. They are very positive about leaders and the quality of communication, advice and guidance they are given. Parents make a significant contribution to the life of the school, including fundraising for projects such as the new sensory garden.
- The Barnsole Primary Trust provides useful and well-judged support. Since the school joined the trust in September 2018, the chief executive has provided expert advice and guidance to the headteacher. The trust board has also bolstered and improved governance. As a result, school leadership has improved since the previous inspection.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance is good. The Barnsole Primary Trust has provided useful support to galvanise the local board, including recruiting governors with specialist expertise. The new chair of governors provides excellent leadership and direction for governors. As a result, governors are now an organised and effective body.
- Governors exercise strong oversight of the school. They challenge leaders effectively and are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They visit the school regularly to talk to pupils and visit classrooms. They have extensive knowledge of the impact of the funding for disadvantaged pupils as well as the additional funding for sports.
- Governors support the trust to monitor the performance of staff and scrutinise the school's safeguarding procedures. Governors work well with the trust board to set targets and contribute to the strategic vision of the trust. Above all, governors are ambitious for the school to improve further.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The systems to protect pupils are exemplary. Checks on the suitability of staff are well managed and regularly reviewed by a governor. Staff are very well trained and kept up to date with the latest guidance, so they know their responsibilities well. Staff new to the school receive comprehensive training as part of their induction.
- Leaders tenaciously pursue the best outcomes for the vulnerable pupils in their care. They follow up on referrals to other agencies and are intolerant of delay or obfuscation. The school works well with local partners as leaders are determined to 'go the extra mile' to seek the best outcomes.
- Parents are very confident in the care and support their children receive. Pupils feel safe and well looked after. They are very confident that staff will deal quickly with any concerns they have.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The majority of teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are determined that pupils do well. In a minority of cases, staff are less adept at planning to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils with more significant barriers.
- Teaching is good because teachers and other adults work well together to plan lessons that engage and stimulate pupils. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 really enjoyed developing holiday brochures. Pupils worked hard and gained a good understanding of the different language features and techniques such as persuasive and informative language.
- Teachers promote thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, pupils were seen grappling with word problems in mathematics using their newly absorbed knowledge of addition. Pupils' books show them making strong progress from their starting points. However, this effective practice is not consistently established across all classes.
- Pupils enjoy reading and they relish the opportunities to sound out letters or words. Teachers are especially effective at planning reading activities that meet the needs of the different pupils in their classes. The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school, with very successful practice embedded across all key stages.
- Teachers make good use of additional resources to support their planning. Pupils learn effectively because teachers are innovative in how they plan for individuals' needs. For example, pupils practise their phonics knowledge using a range of activities and digital resources. Consequently, pupils make sustained progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who fall behind quickly receive additional intervention. Teachers make good use of the advice and guidance from other professionals to adapt their teaching. As a result, the majority of pupils who make less than expected progress get back on track quickly.
- Teachers are especially skilful at teaching writing. There are good systems to support pupils moving from mark-making to letter formation to writing full sentences. Pupils, when able, make the most of opportunities to write at length across a range of topics and themes. These pupils regularly edit and correct their work with appropriate guidance.
- Support staff work especially effectively with pupils. The staff are highly knowledgeable about the individual needs of the pupils they work with. They use questioning, non-verbal cues and apparatus very skilfully. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils and support them very well. There are good systems in place to help those who make less progress than expected. Overall, these pupils make similar rates of progress to their peers in the school.
- All staff make excellent use of the school's assessment system. Pupils and parents receive guidance about what pupils have done well and whether they are meeting the targets set in the education, health and care plans. However, leaders recognise that the current assessment system requires further attention as it does not give adequate information for those pupils with very complex needs.

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils relish their time in school. They describe the school in glowing terms and are rightly proud of their achievements. They enjoy working together, sharing and taking turns, both while learning and in unstructured time.
- Leaders are ambitious for their pupils to be prepared for the wider world. They plan a wide range of activities to meet the needs of their pupils. These include trips to local and regional sites in order to broaden pupils' horizons. For example, key stage 2 pupils reported how much they enjoyed their visit to a restaurant where they prepared south-Asian dishes to share with the rest of the school.
- Parents, pupils and staff commented very positively on the strong sense of community that exists in the school. Leaders work tirelessly to ensure that pupils feel valued and that their achievements are recognised. Parents describe the school as 'having the highest standards for nurturing and care'.
- Pupils make a significant contribution to the life of the school through the school's 'smart council'. Older pupils have opportunities to coach younger pupils, as well as lead and organise assemblies.
- Pupils are very knowledgeable, given their very low starting points, on how to keep safe. They can give useful advice on how to cross the road, as well as outline the potential dangers of using smartphone cameras. They are especially expert in describing what not to do when using a computer online.
- Attendance is very good, considering some of the very complex needs of the pupils. Those few pupils who are absent due to medical conditions are very well supported. Pupils who arrive mid-year also attend exceptionally well, despite having historically poor attendance in previous provision. Pupils' punctuality is exemplary, with one parent describing how their child is 'very eager to get on the bus in the morning'.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils try hard in their lessons and take great pride in their work. Where possible, they correct their mistakes and enjoy showing what they have learned to visitors. They are especially keen to explain what they are doing and to share their successes.
- Leaders have made excellent use of external advice and additional resources to establish a very positive and calm school. Incidents of poor behaviour are very rare and dealt with effectively. Pupils who arrive in the school mid-phase settle in quickly as a result of the strong systems established by leaders. As a result, the number of exclusions has dropped dramatically over the past three years.
- Pupils and parents describe behaviour in the school in very positive terms. Pupils learn and value key skills such as turn-taking, sharing and listening to each other. This is especially the case during 'family dining', where pupils and staff sit together to share

lunch.

- Pupils are tolerant of each other and make pupils who arrive mid-year feel welcome.
- Bullying is very rare, and is dealt with effectively should it occur. Pupils are confident that adults take any concerns seriously and take action appropriately.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- The majority of pupils across all key stages make good progress from their starting points. By the time they leave, they have mastered critical concepts and skills.
- There are strong systems in place to assess pupils' progress. These systems use both the education, health and care plan targets and more formal assessments to track the gains pupils make. As a result of these astute checks on progress, pupils are guided to achieve their targets regularly.
- Pupils make strong progress in their writing and reading. Current progress information shows that an increasing number of pupils are making expected or better than expected progress. This is especially the case with pupils who have social and emotional health needs.
- Recent progress information highlights mathematics as a strength. Books and school data highlight significant improvements in term four. In particular, more pupils with autism spectrum disorders are making better than expected progress in mathematics.
- Pupils leave the school with a well-developed understanding of phonics. They make good progress towards the expected standard for phonics and are well placed to develop their phonics knowledge further.
- The most able pupils in the school make strong progress and are suitably challenged. Pupils' mathematics and English books demonstrate the rapid gains that pupils achieve from their low starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as, and in some cases better than, their peers with similar starting points. This is especially the case in mathematics, where disadvantaged pupils make especially strong progress.
- Pupils with more complex learning difficulties make less progress than their peers. Leaders are aware that the current curriculum does not always meet these pupils' needs and, as a result, are introducing new approaches for these pupils next academic year.

### Early years provision

**Outstanding**

- Leaders keep a close check on the provision for children in the early years. The trust's early years specialist has provided timely and appropriate support. As a result, the early years leader is very effective and has made good use of expertise to develop practice in the provision still further.
- Children start school with increasingly low starting points. They make strong progress in all the key areas. The provision is also used to support pupils who arrive at the school in Year 1 but who would benefit with more time in an early years setting.

Leaders use assessment information astutely to identify the most appropriate interventions and seek external advice where necessary.

- Children enjoy learning at Danecourt. They choose activities that are carefully planned to support their development and show high levels of concentration and persistence. They engage in their learning with great enthusiasm and excitement.
- Safeguarding procedures are thorough. Staff have the appropriate level of training. Children show a great deal of trust in the adults, who keep a close eye on them. Governors also undertake appropriate checks on the site to ensure that all requirements are met.
- Children in the provision arrive with limited communication skills. As a result of very effective teaching, pupils learn to respond to verbal and non-verbal cues. They are increasingly taking turns and listening to each other. The environment is colourful and vibrant but well matched to the needs of the children. Children respond well to the range of resources and play purposefully. They relish investigating and exploring the different learning zones.
- The leader of the early years knows the children exceptionally well. All staff use the assessment information skilfully to analyse the progress pupils make. Staff plan activities especially deftly to meet the needs of the children. As a result, despite their increasingly complex needs, children make good progress in the main areas of learning.
- Where possible, children learn and play together cheerfully. Children learn to share resources, supervised closely by adults. Children follow routines well and look forward to different parts of the day. Children especially enjoy dining together, passing out their water bottles and eating as a group.
- At appropriate points, teachers develop children's understanding of sounds and words. Adults use questioning and verbal prompts skilfully to teach children new words, such as 'sprinkle'. Staff encourage children to express themselves through mark-making and, in the case of the most able, attempting letter writing.
- Parents are fully involved in their children's learning. Leaders have developed innovative systems to share children's achievement with their parents. The daily contact sheets are especially welcomed by parents, who use the information to support children at home. Parents are proud of the progress their children make, and they regularly give feedback to leaders on the new milestones that their children achieve.



## School details

Unique reference number	142266
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10088187

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	161
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Valentine
Headteacher	Cathryn Falconer
Telephone number	01634 232 589
Website	<a href="http://www.danecourtschool.com">www.danecourtschool.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@danecourt.bptrust.org">office@danecourt.bptrust.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- This school opened as an academy, part of the Argent Academy Trust, in 2015. The school subsequently joined the Barnsole Primary Trust in 2018.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2019.
- This school caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorders. However, since the previous inspection, the school is increasingly catering for pupils with severe learning difficulties as demand for places for these pupils grow. All students have an education, health and care plan.
- The majority of students are White British. About 30% are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Bangladeshi, African or Other White backgrounds.
- The majority of the pupils are boys.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the leadership team, members of the governing body, and staff.
- Inspectors visited 14 classes in the school, jointly with senior leaders, and spoke to pupils about their work.
- An inspector spoke with the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation, including safeguarding checks, policies, minutes of meetings, procedures, and school planning documentation.
- Inspectors reviewed a sample of pupils' books from key stage 2.
- Inspectors met pupils informally and formally to get their views of the school. They also observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views by speaking to them after school and considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the free-text responses.

## Inspection team

Seamus Murphy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Emma Phillips

Ofsted Inspector

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