

Dale Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106278
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	287464
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Emerson

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Ledger
Headteacher	Mr Robin Elms
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2001
School address	Wilshaw Lane Ashton-under-Lyne Lancashire OL7 9RF
Telephone number	0161 3307595
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the whole of the Tameside local authority and is for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Although the school is designated to take both boys and girls, there is currently only one girl on roll. 30% of the students have free school meals. 97% of Students come from White British backgrounds. Seven students are looked after by the local authority. All students have statements of special educational need. Some students have additional needs such as moderate learning difficulties. Many students have had a disrupted education because of a history of poor attendance and exclusions from their previous schools. Because of their acknowledged learning difficulties and/or disabilities, students' attainments are well below average. There are 24 pupils in the primary centre and 45 students in the secondary centre. The school is on a split site with seven miles between the two centres.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Dale Grove is a good school. This judgement matches the school's own view of itself and that of the parents. One parent considers that her son is 'happy and settled for the first time in all his schooling'. Teaching and learning are good. Work is set at just the right level for individual students and they are given good support. Consequently, they achieve well and make good progress in acquiring the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and against their individual targets in other areas of learning. Year 11 students gain a variety of qualifications, including GCSEs. Some younger pupils transfer successfully back into mainstream schools. In 2006, all the Year 11 leavers went into employment, training or further education. The school has recently introduced a lively new curriculum. As well as focussing on basic skills, students have good opportunities to study a variety of subjects and develop their social skills. The 'alternative curriculum' which has been introduced for students in Years 10 and 11 is a strength. These students are very positive about the activities, such as their car maintenance project. This motivates the students very well and gives them skills which will be useful in adult life.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Relationships are good and students respond well to the reward systems which are used throughout the school. The majority make good improvements in their behaviour and demonstrate good attitudes in lessons. However, although students' attendance is frequently better than at previous schools, the attendance of some older students is too low. While the school has implemented a variety of strategies to improve attendance, including the recent appointment of a family liaison officer, more is still to be done. Students' moral and social development is promoted well. However, the emphasis on spiritual and cultural development is not as strong and students are not sufficiently prepared for living in an ethnically diverse society. Care, guidance and support are good. The school works closely with a variety of outside agencies, such as the child and adolescent mental health team, to support vulnerable students. Students and parents are involved in setting and reviewing students' detailed learning and behaviour targets. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Suitable procedures are in place to help students to be safe and healthy.

The headteacher and the heads of the secondary and primary centres form an effective leadership team. The headteacher provides a clear direction for the school and is skilled at driving it forward. The school is particularly effective in linking the primary and secondary provision despite the considerable geographical distance between the two centres. Although the school has a generally accurate view of how well it is doing, it does not yet make sufficient use of data about students' progress to set whole-school targets. The school has effectively addressed the issues raised in the previous inspection and has a good capacity to improve further. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with families and students to improve attendance.
- Provide more opportunities to prepare students for living in a culturally diverse society.
- Make more use of information gained about students' progress to drive up standards across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Many pupils enter the school with weak academic skills because their education has been disrupted as a result of poor behaviour. Once settled, pupils achieve well as a result of good teaching. Effective provision to develop the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT enables students with weak basic skills to make strong progress. Students' records show that they achieve well in relation to their individual targets. In order to maximise students' opportunities to gain qualifications, they begin working towards Entry Level qualifications in Year 9. This is an effective strategy and students do well in comparison to students at similar schools. Since 2000, all Year 11 students have gained at least one GCSE pass at grade A* to G. In 2006, the six students gained 16 GCSE passes at grade A* to G, Entry Level passes in English, mathematics and science, and a variety of vocational qualifications and awards of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. This shows a strengthening trend.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Despite the good provision for care, guidance and support, and the good improvements in the behaviour and attitudes of the students, personal development is only satisfactory. Although the attendance of pupils in the primary centre is good, a significant number of older students have poor attendance. Because of the strong vocational programme and good promotion of skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, students develop good workplace skills. This is reflected in the good take-up of courses and employment by school leavers. Students learn to behave safely and told the inspectors that there is little bullying at the school. They enjoy sport and understand the importance of a healthy diet. Students respond well to the school's good provision for moral and social development. However, they are not sufficiently aware of the different cultures which contribute to British society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Teachers and support staff have high expectations of behaviour and good relationships with the students. This results in calm, purposeful lessons where students make good progress. Any challenging behaviour is well managed so that disruption of learning is kept to a minimum. Work set is well matched to students' needs and based on accurate assessment. Well trained, experienced support staff give good support to individual students. Consequently, all students, including those with additional special needs, are fully involved in lessons. Computer-based learning programmes are used effectively to develop students' skills in literacy and numeracy. Staff are skilled at using the reward systems to motivate students to succeed. Students are given good feedback about the quality of their work. This means that they know how well they have done and what they can do to improve. Although resources are generally used well, teachers are not yet confident in using the interactive whiteboards to make learning more exciting.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of students well. There are well planned programmes to support basic literacy, numeracy and additional special educational needs. A variety of educational visits and lively activities such as work on the 'Eco-Schools' project re-engage students, many of whom have developed negative attitudes from previous experiences at school. Students' social and emotional development is promoted well in personal, social and health education lessons and through carefully thought out activities to teach students how to work cooperatively. Students are encouraged to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle with courses supported at times by the local police, youth offending team and the 'Tameside Patrollers'. Older students from Year 9 onwards are offered a very good range of activities, including vocational activities and activities to encourage enterprise and independence and introduce the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are highly committed to promoting the well-being of students. They are very successful in helping them to cope when they have problems or become upset. Vulnerable students, such as those who are looked after, are well supported. All procedures for child protection, the safe recruitment of staff, health, safety and risk assessment are in place. Staff have received good training in how to reduce challenging behaviour and how to defuse and deal with it should it arise. The school has recently appointed a family liaison officer to improve attendance, but this work is in the early stages. The staff make good use of assessment information to track individual students' progress and personal development. All students have detailed targets for learning and behaviour. The very positive regime, which is evident in both centres, constantly reinforces students' efforts and reminds them how they can do even better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, ably assisted by the heads of the primary and secondary centres, provides good leadership. There is a very strong and successful steer to develop Dale Grove as one school. Effective systems are now in place to ensure that both centres offer good quality provision. The school generally has an accurate view of how well it is doing. However, information gained from assessment is not used sufficiently to monitor how well different groups of students are doing or to evaluate the quality of provision in different subject areas. All the issues raised at the previous inspection have been addressed well. In particular, the curriculum has been much improved so that it better meets the learning, emotional and behavioural needs of the students. The school has a good capacity to improve further. Governors are committed and enthusiastic but lack the experience at the current time to fully support and challenge the leadership team. However, financial planning is good and the school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspection team, I am writing to thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed finding out about the things you are doing and talking to you. It was very useful to know what you think about your school.

There are some things that are really good about your school. These are:

- the interesting variety of subjects which you study, particularly on the very good 'alternative curriculum' days
- the good support you are given in lessons which enables you to make good progress with your work
- the reward systems which help you to improve your behaviour
- that all of this is possible because your headteacher and the heads of the primary and secondary centres do their best to make the school as good as they can for you.

I have asked your teachers to improve a few things to make your school even better. These are:

- to help those of you who take more time off school than you should to improve your attendance - it is important that you attend every day to improve your chances when you leave school
- to give you more opportunities to learn about the beliefs and cultures of people from different ethnic backgrounds
- to look carefully at how well you are all doing in different subjects so that they can help you to do even better.

I hope you carry on enjoying what you are doing and continue to help your teachers all you can.