



Danecourt Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119035
Local Authority Medway
Inspection number 291295
Inspection date 1 November 2006
Reporting inspector Frank Price

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Hotel Road
School category	Community		Gillingham
Age range of pupils	4–11		ME8 6AA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01634 232589
Number on roll (school)	113	Fax number	01634 263822
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Terry Spice
		Headteacher	John Somers
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
4–11	1 November 2006	291295

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

There are some significant changes from the time the school was last inspected. There is now a different headteacher and the needs of pupils have changed considerably. Pupils' needs are now much more complex, ranging from severe to moderate learning difficulties. In addition, there has been a sharp increase of pupils who are diagnosed on the autistic spectrum disorder and this accounts for nearly half of the school population. There are no pupils who have English as an additional language. The school provides for pupils across the Medway authority. The school has developed an outreach service to support other pupils in mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Danecourt School is a good school. It meets the needs of a diverse and complex school population very effectively. The school has continued to provide high quality education, following on from the last inspection. The vision for the school is summarised by the chair of governors as 'to be the best school in Medway', which sums up the school's refusal to be complacent. The leadership and management of the school are rightly focusing their energies on standards and the governing body is taking a strong lead in this. Leadership and management are good and have promoted consistently good teaching throughout the school by regular monitoring. The headteacher has started to gather helpful data on pupils' progress and achievements. However, this information is not used as effectively as it might be. For example, it is not used to determine how various groups of pupils are achieving throughout the school and subject leaders do not make enough use of this information for their areas of learning.

The headteacher has been successful in developing close links with a range of partners so that the care, guidance and support pupils receive are excellent. An outstanding feature of the school is the way in which it works very effectively with parents, health professionals and social services. Parents hold the school in very high regard. They feel their children achieve well with one parent commenting, 'The school has high expectations for every child'. The outstanding care given to pupils, enables them to make good gains in their personal development. They are developing healthier lifestyles whilst at school by eating fruit and participating in a good range of physical activities, both inside and outside of school hours. Pupils stated they liked their teachers and this helps them to develop their confidence and enjoy learning. The small groups and good staffing ratio make pupils feel safe and act responsibly.

The standards of pupils' work are exceptionally low, when compared to national averages. However, pupils' achievement is good and they make good progress throughout the school. Children settle quickly into the routines of the Foundation Stage and by the time they move on to the next class, they have already made significant improvements in their ability to follow instructions, and in their communication and independence skills. This helps to prepare them well for the future. This good start is the basis for continued good progress in Key Stages 1 and 2. The good teaching and learning enables pupils to achieve well. The headteacher has enabled teachers and support staff to participate in highly appropriate professional development, to equip them with skills to meet the needs of pupils and this has made learning more effective for pupils. The good curriculum is well organised and is very effective in meeting the wide range of learning needs of all pupils. The Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 use the 'High/Scope' approach, where children are encouraged to plan and review their work. This is effective in helping them to develop their independence skills at an early age. The opportunities for more able pupils to access mainstream schools for both academic and social gains are too limited, as only a few pupils participate in these experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information, by both the headteacher and subject leaders, so that pupils make even faster progress.
- Increase opportunities for more able pupils to spend time in mainstream lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils benefit from good teaching and a good curriculum that is well matched to their needs. As a result, the achievement of pupils is good throughout the school. By the end of Year 6 the most able pupils can achieve at Level 2 in literacy and numeracy, which represents good progress. Particular strengths are pupils' development of their numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Their communication skills are boosted by the very effective speech and language provision. This means that pupils are becoming confident communicators despite having substantial language difficulties initially. Nearly all pupils achieve well against their individual targets. There are many examples of individual good progress being made. One pupil on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder, who has been at the school for just over a year, has made exceptional gains in his basic skills in a short period of time. The school has recognised that some pupils' reading skills need further improvement and that more able pupils need more opportunities to extend their learning so that they have a greater level of challenge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good gains in their personal development. In lessons and discussions pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and to one another. Pupils like school and they have trusting and supportive relationships with staff and they feel safe. They find learning enjoyable and this is reflected in their good attendance. Some pupils cite mathematics as a favourite subject along with subjects such as music, art and physical education. Foundation Stage children enjoy singing nursery rhymes and like practical activities such as making play dough cakes and running a shop. Pupils are well prepared for the future through the development of their independence and self-advocacy skills. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Assemblies have a broadly Christian focus and pupils enjoy singing with gusto. Other religious festivals, such as Diwali are also marked. They have a strong sense of right and wrong. However, their appreciation of wider and different cultures is satisfactory, as opportunities are more limited. Pupils make a good contribution to the wider community by involvement in a sheltered housing project and raising money for charities. Their contribution to the school community is good, through their active involvement in the school council and the opportunities to be playground buddies. They cooperate well together in lessons and pupils are polite and well behaved.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers are very skilled at using alternative forms of communication such as signing, symbols or photographs. For example, in one lesson focusing on bonfire night, one pupil was able to say, 'I see fireworks' using symbols. Specialist approaches have been adopted such as the Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) across the school and highly structured teaching methods for pupils with autism. This has resulted in pupils' communication and comprehension skills being developed very effectively. Teaching is successful in meeting the wide range of needs of learners, and support staff are skilled at supporting pupils sensitively. Excellent teamwork ensures pupils receive consistent support and help. The teaching observed was lively and enthusiastic and pupils responded well to this. Teachers use a range of practical activities to enable pupils to engage in learning. For example, in one lesson this involved the use of the interactive whiteboard to show a firework display and then using ribbons to simulate the movement of fireworks. Initial assessment information in the Foundation Stage does not allow the school to easily demonstrate the good progress that children make.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum does much to promote pupils' physical activity through a range of sports and playground activities. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage encourages children to make simple choices and evaluate their work from an early age. Of particular note is the way that the curriculum has been adapted to suit the needs of those pupils who have some form of autism. Good individual education plans are helpful in setting targets for literacy, numeracy and personal development, which are regularly reviewed. The leadership of curriculum subjects is a focus for development by the headteacher to make subject leaders more accountable for standards in their area of learning. Subject leaders do not use assessment information enough to give them a clear view of where the strengths and weaknesses lie in their respective subjects. Currently only four pupils have access to lessons in mainstream schools and some more able pupils could benefit socially and academically from more of these opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding care, support and guidance given to pupils ensure that any difficulties that impinge upon pupils' learning are quickly resolved through the school's regular review system. Child protection arrangements are robust and all staff are fully trained. The links the school has developed with other partners are excellent and this has resulted in better provision being made available at the school. An example of this is the very effective multi-disciplinary working of the extended speech and language therapy provision. This has had a significant impact on improving pupils' speech and

communication skills by providing early intervention and intensive support for pupils with language difficulties. Parents are pleased with the work of this provision and describe it as 'a real asset to the school'. The academic guidance given to pupils is very good, for example pupils know their targets and this assists them to make good progress. Individual education programmes are shared with parents and this good partnership promotes pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The governing body acts very effectively as a critical friend to the school and is beginning to provide real challenge. It is starting to hold key members of the school to account. For example, curriculum leaders are being asked about standards in their subject and what actions have been implemented and their impact. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is widely shared. This shared sense of purpose results in all pupils making good progress. The school development plan provides a clear blueprint of how future improvements will be secured. The school provides good support to pupils who are in mainstream schools awaiting a placement at Danecourt. This service is vital and is well managed by the headteacher.

The headteacher has been successful in improving the accommodation and a new building will be opened shortly for pupils in the Early Years. The headteacher has ensured that teaching has remained strong and the curriculum has been modified to meet the increased complexity of learners' needs. The school is rigorous in the monitoring of all aspects of its work and is increasingly using external people to provide an objective view of the school. The school has a broadly accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. Its self-evaluation is good but some judgements are not sufficiently well founded. For example, the school had graded some aspects as outstanding, but it does not use assessment information well enough to support these judgements. However, with a strong governing body and a dedicated staff team, the school is well placed to make further improvements and therefore has good capacity for improvement.

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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	1

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.

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	2
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	1
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

I enjoyed my visit to your school and I want to thank particularly the pupils who took time to meet with me over lunchtime to share your thoughts and views about the school.

I agree with you that Danecourt is a good school and I can see why you like coming to school. I think the teaching you receive is good and this helps you to make good progress, especially in meeting your targets. I was particularly impressed that you knew these and this helps you to work well and gives you a sense of achievement when you have met them. The people running your school do a good job. Your headteacher has made sure that what you are taught is exactly right for everybody in the school. You are able to develop your independence and maturity very well. I think you have good opportunities to make your views known, for example through the school council. The school is very good at caring for you and helping you. An example of this is the way the school works with a range of people such as your speech therapists and parents and this means your needs are met well.

To make your school even better, I have made two suggestions.

- The school could use some of its information better, so that it knows clearly how well every pupil in the school is doing.
- The school could provide more opportunities for some pupils to spend some time in mainstream schools.

I hope that you will continue to work hard to meet your targets and that you do your best for all the staff at school.