

Dorin Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111511
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310611
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Hunt

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
Number on roll	
School	76
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stuart Parker
Headteacher	Mrs A Hinchliffe
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
School address	Wealstone Lane Upton Chester Cheshire CH2 1HD
Telephone number	01244 381951
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Dorin Park is a special school for children with complex needs. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Numbers have risen, and since the last inspection there has been an increase in children coming to the school with more severe and profound difficulties, and with autism. The nature of the pupils' difficulties means that they are all working below national expectations. Pupils can be admitted at any stage in their school life, though most are first admitted into Key Stage 1. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. A few are looked after by the local authority. Girls outnumber boys, while about one third are eligible for free school meals. Pupils travel from Cheshire and North Wales. The school is a specialist SEN college, and holds the National Healthy Schools Award, Artsmark Gold, Performing Arts Gold, Investors in People, Eco Silver Award and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'We are so proud of our son being at Dorin Park,' and 'my daughter has gained in confidence', are typical of the comments received from parents summing up their high levels of satisfaction with the school.

Achievement is good. All pupils, whatever their starting points, make good progress. As a result, the majority of the students leave the sixth form with accreditation in Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and entry level GCSE accreditation. The school is developing more vocational courses to meet the ever-increasing needs of all students.

Personal development is exceptional because pupils receive outstanding care, support and guidance from very dedicated and skilled staff. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. All pupils blossom into very mature and considerate young citizens. Pupils love school and this is reflected in good attendance and enthusiasm in lessons. They adopt healthy lifestyles well through the Healthy Schools initiative and there is a very high level of participation in activities such as hydrotherapy, performing arts and lunchtime 'belly dancing'. Pupils say they feel safe and that there is no bullying. Pupils' contribution to the community is outstanding, raising money for both local and international charities. The school's specialist status has helped improve opportunities for all the pupils with performing arts, great theatrical productions are taking place throughout the year, such as the 'Story of Esther' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream'. The school council's input to staff recruitment including the headteacher and site manager is excellent and their hard work in preparing a bid to get the school the Eco Green Award is impressive. Judging by the skills pupils develop in communication, literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and enterprise, they are well prepared for the future.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and some is outstanding. It is particularly strong for the youngest pupils. Good use is made across the school of a range of teaching strategies to promote communication skills. The climate for learning is calm and purposeful in all classes and around the building. This means that pupils of all abilities work with the confidence to try things out for themselves and develop their independence. All teachers and pupils are supported very well by their teaching assistants and the many adult volunteers. This ensures that pupils receive the guidance they need to help them achieve their best both personally and academically. Staff are well trained and there is an outreach provision which provides the teachers and their assistants, who are highly competent, an opportunity to share their expertise with staff in mainstream schools.

The curriculum is good and provides many opportunities for enrichment. There are occasions in the secondary area of the school when the curriculum is not always well balanced. For example, in the secondary department, mathematics can be taught all morning with design technology taught all afternoon. This does not give pupils a balanced diet. On occasions, the pace is too slow for the more able pupils. The management of these subject curriculum and learning issues is not rigorous. Punctuality at the start and end of lessons is not sharp enough with the result that pupils do not get a full teaching session.

Over the past 12 months, the new headteacher and her newly structured leadership team have worked hard to bring about change. Staff feel their opinions count and middle managers and support staff have taken on the responsibility of subject leadership across the school. The governing body is closely involved in supporting staff and pupils. It challenges the senior

managers and ensures it monitors the school's performance. As a result, the school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate.

Dorin Park was judged to be outstanding when it was inspected in May 2005. Since then, there have been significant changes involving budgetary difficulties, changes to the pupil profile and in staffing, and restructuring. It is now a good and improving school, providing good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

All students make good progress. Teaching is good, and sometimes it is outstanding. Students have good access to work experience and the support they need. This helps to promote outstanding personal development. Students receive the guidance and support they require and are well prepared for adult life. At the present time, the school is in the process of providing more vocational courses that are accredited to better meet the needs of all students. Leadership of the sixth form is as effective as it is in the rest of the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision ensures that children make a good start to school life. Children settle into learning routines very quickly because of the positive learning environment and strong staff support. Children make particularly good progress in communication, personal and social development. Owing to there being very few Foundation aged children, they are taught alongside Year 1 and 2 children and their needs are well met as a result of effective planning. All children enjoy their time at school and are well aware of the needs of others in their class. Staff ensure that children are effectively engaged in learning. For instance, in a lesson about mini-beasts, children were thrilled to make various spiders and ant models and see the images of butterflies flying past on the interactive board. Improvements have taken place since the last inspection with an attractive outside classroom and play area having been developed. Leadership and management are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve punctuality so that lessons start and finish on time.
- Improve the management of subjects to ensure better balance and more challenge, especially for the more able.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils make good progress from the time they enter the school. This is most marked in their personal development. School assessments and records show that pupils make steady gains in overall achievement because their individual needs are well met. The school has started to compare its results nationally as well as exploring differences in achievement between the different disabilities and learning needs. This is informing staff planning and is helping pupils' progress. Students in Years 12 to 14 achieve well in nationally accredited courses. These celebrate both their academic and social achievements. All pupils' physical well-being is enhanced by many opportunities to take part in swimming, movement therapy and by using the local gym.

The school is involved in the arts, with pupils performing really well in productions at various venues throughout the academic year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Throughout their time in the school, the children and pupils develop awareness of their feelings and how to express these appropriately. They enjoy school very much. Attendance is good. Any absence is always for a good reason. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils are very considerate of one another and obey the school rules. The elected members of the school council are very proud to represent their classmates and other members of the school. The council members interviewed the prospective headteachers and site managers and they feel that they have a very important role to play in the day-to-day workings of the school. The willingness of those who are able to help and support the younger and more vulnerable is exceptional. Sixth formers act as buddies to younger children helping them to safely enjoy their playtime. Everybody empathises with others less fortunate than themselves and strongly support local and national charities. During rehearsals for Europe Day they sang their theme song for supporting 'Street Child Africa'. Everybody says they feel very safe and they take advantage of the many activities to be healthy, such as in their work in physical education, with the sports coach, and in the physiotherapy and hydrotherapy sessions. Lunchtimes are pleasant social occasions where pupils interact very well with adults and each other. Everyone takes advantage of the pleasant grounds and play equipment provided to promote their physical development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good because activities are usually well planned to match the individual needs of the pupils and to cater for the diverse range of abilities, learning difficulties and personalities. Communication aids and symbols are used skilfully. The youngest pupils get off to an excellent start where teaching is outstanding in the Foundation and primary 1 class. Staff have a very secure understanding of the learning and social needs of everyone. Lessons focus on developing pupils' practical skills by involving them well, supported by good support staff and resources. However, there are times when the length of the lessons are overlong to sustain challenge for some more able pupils and lessons are slow to start, and late to end, because of poor punctuality. Generally, effective use is made of ICT in lessons and daily incidents and events are communicated well to parents through the home-school diaries. Assessment is effective with progress well recorded and regularly reported to parents and carers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There is an extensive range of subjects on offer which effectively meet the diverse needs of the pupils. The attention given to everyone's physical well-being is outstanding. The timetable at secondary level is a little unbalanced when a subject is taught for the whole morning. This

leads to a lessening of pace and, sometimes, the more able pupils lose interest in what is being taught.

A range of school trips together with visitors to school provide variety and interest as well as the very necessary practical and sensory experiences. These are celebrated well through displays around the school. Excellent links with other schools, including in mainstream, provide further enrichment. Everybody makes good use of the school grounds and there are a number of lunchtime clubs, and a 'Shakespeare' after-school club, which are well attended. The specialist status of the school has helped performing arts develop well with regular play productions and workshops for the community and local schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Staff are very strongly committed to pupils' best interests. Provision for safeguarding children is thorough. All those that work at the school know what is expected of them. Careful risk assessments are made for all activities within school and for visits and residential trips. The progress of pupils is monitored thoroughly and the more able pupils assess their own achievements. Personal, academic and behavioural targets are set through individual education and behavioural plans which are very specific and of high quality. Teachers and classroom staff are very skilful in giving learners praise and promoting their confidence. They also make clear to them what they need to do to improve. The school makes excellent provision to guide and support students who are due to leave school. Links with other agencies are strong and promote the interests of the students very well. The school ensures that vulnerable students receive the support they need. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and rate the school very highly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Well led by the headteacher, and based upon generally accurate evaluation, all staff respond extremely well to the needs of the pupils. The school has been without a deputy headteacher for nearly a year due to her long term absence and the senior management team have had many of their responsibilities redefined, a challenge they have willingly taken on board. Staff are given good opportunities to lead and take responsibility for initiatives and projects. Governors make a good contribution too. They have an accurate understanding of the work of the school and they make sure that the headteacher and her staff are accountable for all the actions that they take. The capacity to improve is good because of all the new initiatives that have been put into place and the efficient way the school is dealing with an ever-changing school population, particularly in the complexity of needs.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I am writing to let you know what I found out. It is based on what you and your parents and carers told me as well as what I saw for myself in the school. I would especially like to thank the school council for being so helpful on your behalf.

Yours is a good school. The teachers and staff care for you extremely well and they work closely with people from other agencies to find the best ways of helping you. You do really well in gaining confidence and self-esteem because you listen so well. You make good progress because of your hard work and you know what you have to do to achieve better.

The school provides many opportunities for you to take part in exciting activities. I like the way that you have so many chances to experience working with children and young people from other schools and also the performing arts and sport you are so involved in.

I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make the school day better by making sure you are more prompt at the start and end of all your lessons and to ensure that your lessons are interesting and not too long in each subject. This is particularly important for those of you who might be able to achieve even more. You can help by really making an effort to getting to lessons on time. I am sure you will.

I wish you all the best for the future.