

The Dales School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121771
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	314092
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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	65
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gareth Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Hanne Barton
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Morton-on-Swale Northallerton North Yorkshire DL7 9QW
Telephone number	01609 772932
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Dales School is designated as a special school for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. There are few minority ethnic pupils and none are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below that found typically in a school of this kind. Their attainment on entry is well below the national average reflecting the severity of pupils' needs. A significant number of pupils are designated as in public care because of the respite provision made for their families. Imaginative use is made of off-site provision to support pupils' education. The local authority is currently reviewing its strategy for pupils with special educational needs. This school provides outreach support to help mainstream schools include pupils with severe and complex needs. It has gained the following awards: Investors in People Award, Healthy Schools Award, Activemark and Sportsmark and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher and chair of governors in partnership have successfully created a culture whereby all staff refuse to allow pupils' disability to be a barrier to their learning and achievement. Consequently, parents and carers say, 'this is a school which is innovative in its approach to teaching, maximising the realistic potential of each pupil'. A dedicated and hard working team of teachers, teaching assistants and health professionals ensure that pupils are enabled to communicate their needs using a range of suitable aids. Consequently, pupils gain confidence to cope in the community independently. A particular strength is the advocacy support given to pupils to enable them to express their views, and in a dignified manner make decisions about their own care plans and education. In some aspects of its work, such as outreach support with mainstream schools to include pupils with severe learning difficulties, the school is at the cutting edge of improving the quality of life for pupils with disabilities.

Achievement against the objectives within many pupils' statements of special educational need is good. They make rapid gains in communication and become confident learners. At the same time, pupils whose medical needs slow their progress significantly, together with their families, are supported exceptionally well. Teaching is good and geared to meet the needs of the pupils. Teachers are very knowledgeable about the important issues which face pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties in their lives and help them develop the skills required to become as independent as possible. They ensure that they are comfortably positioned to access learning and that the resources grasp their interest and attention. A small proportion of teaching is satisfactory and does not sufficiently challenge pupils or give them enough time to respond to questions. On these rare occasions the pace of learning slows. The curriculum is good and ensures that pupils develop life and work-related skills.

Aspects of the quality of care and support pupils receive are outstanding, but the system of tracking the very small steps of progress they make is not sufficiently refined; it impinges slightly on the overall quality of teaching and learning. Some parents express a concern about cuts in the hours of health professionals who so effectively support their children's learning at school and about deficiencies in the accommodation. The headteacher has strategies to overcome these deficiencies, such as providing good quality educational provision for pupils on other sites and effectively deploying educational staff to support pupils' medical needs. The school recognises that the curriculum provision, although good could be improved if it had a specialist sensory room. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Imaginative and creative strategies promote their health, fitness and safety exceptionally well. Leadership and management are effective at all levels, but the management of a system to more effectively track those very small steps of progress pupils make is not yet good enough. Governance is very good. Improvement since the last inspection is good as is the capacity for further improvement. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is well led and managed. Students progress well so that by the time they leave school the vast majority are equipped to enter further education colleges enabling them to achieve their potential. The curriculum is good and ensures that pupils extend the life and work-related skills built successfully earlier in school. The outstanding opportunities started

in Key Stage 4 to work alongside able-bodied students at college are continued. Good teaching and learning ensures students continue to build in confidence and so that they stand every chance of living as independently as possible; a significant strength being the way in which they are supported in being assertive about their rights whilst being aware of their responsibilities. An outside careers advisor provides excellent support in enabling post-16 students to access the very best further education courses when they leave school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Foundation Stage with very severe and complex needs. Because of the good teaching and care they receive, they make good progress. Enticed by objects of reference and their accompanying symbol at the start of the day children begin to attend with their eyes. Over time, some make good progress as seen by the child who in answer to the question, 'Can you find me the picture for going home time?', fetched the correct symbol and waving with her hands vocalised 'Goodbye'! Breakthroughs such as this bring real joy to parents. The teacher and teaching assistants work effectively on what is most important in a child's life at that moment in time. It may be to tolerate sitting on a chair for a few seconds; touching a messy substance without screaming; attending with the eye for a split second at the computer. The severity of children's needs is catered for well. Effective leadership and management have successfully adapted the national strategy for children of this age so that it meets the needs of children with extremely complex needs. Hard work and imagination have gone into ensuring that an incredibly small outdoor area is used effectively to support children's development of communication, physical development skills and social development through interesting play activities in the fresh air daily.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the small amount of satisfactory teaching so as to raise achievement further.
- Improve the system for tracking the very small steps of progress pupils make and use this information to improve planning and raise achievement.
- Work with partners to improve the accommodation to enhance further the curriculum; and to ensure the acute health needs of pupils continue to be met.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science. Gains in developing communication skills are rapid. Using switches and pointing with their eyes, pupils with the most complex needs express what they want. Others communicate choices independently and successfully using pictures. The highest attainers talk confidently and with humour. Progress in reading is good. Pupils with the most complex needs show anticipation and express excitement during sensory story time; others read pictures and symbols; whilst the highest attainers read age appropriate texts, such as a modified version of 'The Tempest'. Because many of the pupils have poor hand control, writing is difficult for them. However, the highest attainers write interesting stories, assisted well by computer programs. Pupils develop practical mathematical skills well across subjects and in science they begin to sequence information with a degree of accuracy. Information and communication technology supports the good progress pupils make, as seen in a Key Stage 3 music lesson where a pupil used his

head to control sound by breaking a beam to create a tune. Outstanding opportunities made for Key Stage 4 pupils to work alongside able-bodied students at college make a very valuable contribution to their good gains in confidence and learning. They excel in creative arts and put on joint public performances with students from the college. The skills they accrue at college and on work placements are accredited. Their communication, work and social skills are well developed.

Pupils with severe hearing impairment make rapid gains with letter sounds because of the support given by the speech therapist. Good positioning enables many to feed independently and with dignity. Pupils with severe medical conditions are fully included in all learning experiences. Their achievements, such as being free from pain, because of sensitive positioning in the hydrotherapy pool are celebrated. The highest attainers make good progress and are enabled, with support, to join in learning with pupils in mainstream schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils enjoy school as seen by the gorgeous smiles on their faces and the glow in their eyes in lessons. Keen to have their say through the school council, pupils make a valuable contribution, with advocacy support, to improving the school's environment. All are involved in decision-making about the quality of their education provision as part of their annual review. The headteacher successfully promotes pupils' interest in healthy eating by supplementing the daily fruit provided by the local authority with large and colourful bunches of grapes and bags of oranges which excite their taste buds. An all-inclusive physical education programme which includes the use of a swing designed for disabled children, dancing in wheelchairs and horse riding contributes well to pupils' physical fitness. Pupils' independence and work skills are developed well in real life work situations. Behaviour is good. As pupils are given the means to communicate choice about their lives they become less frustrated and their behaviour improves. This is particularly noticeable amongst pupils with autism. Attendance is good. Authorised absence reflects visits to and treatment in hospital for pupils with acute medical needs. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good and pervades school life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good and so pupils learn well. Teachers' enthusiasm and love for the job give their teaching a sparkle and the sensory resources they use causes pupils to be stimulated, attend with their eyes and communicate responses. A particular strength is the way in which teachers give pupils opportunities to respond using signs; pictures; switches; electronic devices for talking; and using words. Assuring the dignity of the pupil lies at the heart of all teaching and learning, and, consequently, pupils gain confidence in that they are secure to answer questions in the manner they are comfortable with. A clear understanding of pupils' individual needs is central in most of the teaching, as evidenced by the lesson in which a child was moved through his anxiety of touching messy substances to explore a sticky mess. Colourful objects, use of sounds and movement are the secret ingredients in gaining pupils' interest and excitement in

learning. Teaching assistants are very skilful in ensuring that all pupils are included in the activities in lessons and in managing their behaviour. In particular, they give excellent support to pupils who are having a bad day due to new medication or a change in their circumstance. Computers are used well to move pupils on in their learning, particularly in writing and meeting specific additional needs such as visual impairment. On the rare occasions where teaching is satisfactory, teachers talk too much and do not give the pupils enough space to respond to questions. In addition, in such lessons expectations are not always high enough and the pace of learning drops.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. Each pupil has a personal, tailor-made curriculum programme matched to need. Therapy is integral to the curriculum reducing the amount of time pupils are removed from class to support their medical needs. The National Curriculum has been suitably modified throughout Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3. It is relevant and focuses on developing pupils' communication and mobility skills effectively through interesting and relevant sensory activities. However, pupils do not get the opportunity to learn a foreign language. This is not a statutory breach because of the way in which they have been correctly exempted, but it hinders the school's otherwise effective enhancement of pupils' awareness of cultural diversity. Provision for religious education and personal, social, health and citizenship education is good. These subjects enable pupils to develop as sensitive and caring citizens and contribute effectively to supporting them in adopting a healthy and safe lifestyle. Key Stage 4 pupils attend college and experience valuable vocational experiences in the work place. These experiences equip them well to become responsible and, as far as is possible, independent citizens in the community. Creative use of off-site provision compensates for deficiencies in the school's accommodation and enables students to be included in college with able-bodied students. Although teachers do everything they can to overcome the lack of a specialist sensory room, provision is not as effective as it might otherwise be. Good use is made of visitors and visits to enhance pupils' learning. Students who attend the local college enjoy an after-college drama club.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of care and support is outstanding, but the system for tracking the very small steps of progress pupils make requires refinement. Pupils' needs, including their medical needs, are known and catered for exceptionally well. Staff know what triggers anxiety in the pupils and plan to keep them stress free without failing to challenge them. Health professionals work in an effective partnership with education staff to ensure that some very sick pupils access a good curriculum. Parents speak exceptionally well of them, but are concerned about the level of support. External advocacy support benefits pupils enormously as they gain confidence in speaking up for themselves. Induction procedures are outstanding and help children settle very quickly into school. Robust child protection procedures are in place. Risk assessments are thorough and detailed. There are clear protocols and procedures in place to ensure medicines are administered safely, that the chemical balance of the hydrotherapy pool is maintained correctly and for the disposal of clinical waste.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. She has successfully involved all staff in decision-making and planning for school improvement. She ensures that all staff receive good professional development which benefits the pupils and equips them well for their career development. Consequently, staff morale is high. Members of the senior leadership team are clear about roles and responsibilities and how their work impacts on removing barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils with complex needs. The management of outreach support for mainstream schools to help them include pupils with very complex needs is a significant strong feature. Effective systems are in place for monitoring the school's performance. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well and successfully plans for improvement. However, the system to track the small steps of progress pupils make is not sharp enough and this important management task is in need of improvement. Governance is very effective. Governors support and constructively challenge the headteacher very effectively.

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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	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?	2	2
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	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	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	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	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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

The inspectors greatly enjoyed visiting your school and seeing all of the interesting and exciting work you do. It was a joy to talk with so many of you and your teachers and teaching assistants.

We think that your school is good with some outstanding features. You are cared for very well and make good progress in making your needs known. You gain confidence in school where learning is fun and mostly challenging. You behave well and become increasingly independent during your time at school. Your school helps you to keep healthy and to express your point of view and be involved in your own care plans. Your headteacher ensures that your school is well led and managed.

We have asked Mrs Barton to improve a few things so that your school becomes even better. We would like her to ensure that you are given the sufficient time to answer questions in all lessons and that you are always challenged. Also we would like her to improve ways of gathering information about the small steps of progress you make. Finally, we have asked her to work with partners to improve the school's accommodation; to enhance the curriculum; and ensure your health needs continue to be met.