

# Danecourt Community School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119035
<b>Local Authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	339329
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lynne Kauffman

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	115
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Jeff Talbot
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr John Somers
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2006
<b>School address</b>	Hotel Road Gillingham Kent ME8 6AA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 232589
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## Introduction

Three additional inspectors, one for one day, one for one and a half days and one for two days, carried out this inspection. The inspectors visited 13 lessons and a lunchtime club, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils, parents, and teachers at a local junior school. They observed the school's work, and looked at policy documents, books and folders in class, the school development plan and the two new assessment strategies as well as materials in the Early Years Foundation Stage and 31 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The quality of response from all staff to the previous issue for improvement regarding the consistent, accurate collection and use of data to improve planning and enable individual pupils to reach their potential
- The challenge for more able pupils integrated into mainstream
- Parental engagement in the review of the school's policies and procedures
- The impact of the governors' strategic planning and the senior leadership team's management of achievement and the Every Child Matters agenda so that personal development raises aspirations of pupils and parents
- Monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching used to raise the profile of teaching across the school
- Ensuring the school meets the requirements for effective safeguarding procedures.

## Information about the school

Danecourt Community School is a primary special school for pupils aged 5 to 11 years with 115 local authority purchased places. Originally designated for pupils with moderate learning difficulty, the school is increasingly catering for severe learning difficulty and more complex needs. The school provides for pupils across the Medway Authority. Since 2004, it has had a designated unit for pupils with severe autistic spectrum disorders; the unit is increasing in size. The school has few children from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are more boys than girls in the school. A building programme has influenced the flexible use of school spaces, including an outreach unit that provides training and support to other schools. The school is popular and has a waiting list of 47 pupils.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

One parent explained 'Everyone who comes into Danecourt feels welcome ' this is a family as much as a school.' All staff continually strive to improve the provision for the learners. Owing to their learning difficulties, the standards reached by learners in most cases are exceptionally low, but all pupils do very well in their lessons and many make outstanding progress. A small minority of pupils are successfully reintegrated into a local mainstream school. An emphasis on basic skills and personal development ensures all pupils have the tools to enable them to be as happy and independent as possible in their future lives. Most pupils have a good understanding of how to remain healthy, keep safe and they behave extremely well. They respond very well to the school's ethos of high expectations. Parents and carers unanimously reflected their overwhelming praise for the school through questionnaires and the 'Bouquets and Roses' book containing comments and cards from parents and visitors to the school.

The quality of teaching is good overall, with many examples of outstanding teaching. For example, in one class, opportunities for role-play to explore a story explaining a different culture brought an excellent, guided response from all pupils. In the few satisfactory lessons, staff are not confidently using data to plan to match pupil need. These staff are being coached to support them in raising their standard of teaching. Teachers plan lessons well and the good work of support staff challenges pupils' personal progress. Planning has a specific focus on social skills to encourage good communication that influences pupils progress. The school's accelerated work in the area of assessment involves all staff; this was an action point from the previous inspection which has now been resolved. New systems to support learning for pupils on the autistic spectrum have been successfully piloted. In addition, a programme to allow the school to provide visual as well as percentage data is being explored by the leadership team. This is a useful development as parents and carers and other stakeholders often find information from the school difficult to understand because of the technical language used.

Basic skills of communication, mathematics, information and communication technology and personal development form the bedrock of the effective curriculum. Cross-curricular links vary in their impact on learning. Excellent links to local schools through the outreach programme, and the supported reintegration of more able pupils, are having an excellent impact on individual pupils and the profile of reintegration into the community.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are carefully tailored to the needs of each pupil. Excellent links with a range of therapists and health personnel ensure that the pupils and their families receive consistent and sensitive support. Reports, individual education

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plans and annual reviews are thoughtfully coordinated to provide parents and carers with a detailed review of their children's academic and personal development. Parents and carers value the headteacher's open door policy and his explicit knowledge about every child in the school. Excellent safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements; procedures and training in strategies for child protection are secure and regularly reviewed.

The school sets itself challenging targets through its exciting, innovative promotion of 'thinking outside the box' to enable the best possible provision for individual pupils' needs. The pilot plan for reintegrating the more able pupils into mainstream is well managed and monitored and is evidence of the project's resounding success for the Danecourt pupils and the schools involved.

Remarkable drive and ambition for the pupils make the leadership team of Danecourt School outstanding. The headteacher's inspired lateral thinking leaves no stone unturned when considering opportunities for his pupils' development. This is underpinned by the exceptional skills of the deputy headteacher in ensuring all systems, procedures and recording are exemplary. The governors' excellent knowledge and support for the school is visible. Leadership is introducing leaner and more effective structures and policies to add to the efficiency of governors' active partnership role with the senior staff in the school's journey to further improvement.

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

- Create enriched curriculum opportunities to further match the developmental needs of pupils.
- Drive up the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure all documentation is in everyday language, especially that regarding pupils' performance, so that stakeholders, including parents and carers, have a better understanding of progress and achievement.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**1**

All learners achieve well and many make outstanding progress, including the small number of pupils from different cultural backgrounds. Pupils' attainment, however, remains consistently lower than expected in mainstream because of the nature of pupils' complex learning difficulties. The wrap-around support for pupils' complex needs, including outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils and their families and good and often outstanding teaching, enables pupils to make excellent progress. Pupils are confident and are able to make guided decisions. They feel safe and many know about people in the community that help to keep them safe and know about safety issues without being afraid. Behaviour is excellent because all pupils are regularly reminded about the schools expectations; relationships are exceptional. More pupils understand their successes through photographic records of their progress, for example the learning journeys used in early years. Pupils are happy and healthy and respond well to encouragement to maintain a healthy lifestyle in relation to diet, exercise and emotional

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development. Pupils enjoy the many lunchtime activities, such as dance club and football, which enrich their experience and raise their confidence. At playtime, pupils interact well, care for each other and develop guided and self-motivated games. Learners' contribution to the wider community is limited by their complexity of need but their involvement in the school community is very good, for example as members of the school council. Pupils often work in pairs and groups to explore the development of work place skills. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The singing assembly rolled all aspects of this area into one experience; pupils' actions, interactions and singing 'raised the roof'!

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers' management of their classroom and use of time is good. They are well supported by helpful classroom assistants in their careful observation of pupils and assessment of the progress they make. Consequently, they know their pupils well. Many pupils are difficult to engage: however, staff are highly skilled in the best ways to help them learn. For those pupils on the autistic spectrum, all teaching is appropriately

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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modified to take account of pupils' preferred learning style and known aversions. Effective routines are an important part of planning; this enables most learners to do their best because of a consistency in learning strategies. In satisfactory lessons, staff do not use data confidently enough to target pupils' needs in their planning of lessons. This has been identified by the school and coaching is improving the quality of planning. There are also more challenges to widen experience for those learners who are able to deal more readily with change. Throughout the school, staff make excellent use of a variety of communication systems, including picture and symbols exchange. This enables pupils to review their visual timetable as well as communicate more easily. Excellent speech and language support has a huge impact on pupils' confidence and self-esteem and their learning. Regular praise and feedback encourage pupils towards the next steps in their learning. Classroom management skills are a strong feature of teaching, such as positive reinforcement and strategies to calm and manage pupils with challenging behaviour. Assessment has improved since the previous inspection but the use of data is not consistent across all staff and there are some inconsistencies in marking and feedback to pupils.

The lively and inventive curriculum reflects the complex needs of learners, for example a sensory approach for some and more structured approaches for others. The interaction between therapies used, such as speech and language, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, is strengthening as the management of these teams becomes more unified, therefore having a greater impact on learners. An emphasis on basic skills, supported by a constantly developing creative curriculum, challenging subject leaders and the governors' curriculum committee. Areas that focus on pupils' knowledge of the wider community and work related skills are areas for curriculum development. The curriculum also has the flexibility to take on new challenges to support the local authority where they are having difficulty in placing a pupil. Pupils are the central focus for any curriculum development, ensuring the school's aims for a community where individuals are valued, challenged and successful, are followed through.

The welfare of learners has the highest priority. Staff manage pupils' personal care with the minimum of fuss and the maximum regard for their wishes and dignity. Child protection procedures are well established and regularly reviewed. Risk assessment ensures all activities are pursued within safe limits. An example is the highly structured arrival and departure of coaches, coordinated efficiently by the site manager and ensuring all pupils are safe. The vital involvement of the family liaison worker is adding an extra dimension to care and support through regular contact by phone, email, text, letters and face-to-face contact to ensure families have appropriate support. Secure record keeping reflects close monitoring for vulnerable pupils. In individual education plans, pupils have a consistent focus on small steps in both academic and personal development targets, which challenge them to do their best.

Pupils that are more able have followed a well-managed transition into mainstream, which is proving very successful. Annual reviews are generally well attended by parents. The excellent support from external agencies, such as the highly acclaimed speech and language department, make a valuable contribution to these reviews, but some parents

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still find it difficult to understand the feedback.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The senior team guides the school with a passion and dedication that is contagious and reflected in the skills of middle management teams and support staff. Improvement since the previous inspection has been outstanding because the areas for development have been taken further than the key issues recommended and have integrated national initiatives. The governors are integral to the school's development through their excellent strategic management and hands-on involvement in their overview of school procedures. Joint observations and inspiring cross-matched procedures, that monitor and evaluate learning, are precise and enabling. The leadership team encourages teachers and teaching assistants to actively develop their own careers; this has an excellent impact on recruitment and retention. Evaluation and monitoring of all school initiatives secure outstanding developments. However, the audit and action plan for community cohesion lacks information to measure impact. Pilot work with two new systems, led by senior managers, is driving the use of even more rigorous recording and analysis of the success of pupils on the autistic spectrum.

The school has a vision to work with the authority to seize opportunities for planned reintegration or satellites of Danecourt School. This would involve the school's excellent Rainbow Court outreach programme in training staff and parents. There is strong evidence from the school to suggest such partnerships will work. The school's financial position is sound as measured by the Medway light touch review. Good housekeeping, which is maintaining the balanced budget, ensures the most appropriate up-to-date resources are available for the pupils with complex needs.

The school's leadership and management consistently research and review all areas of teaching and learning. Assessment never stands still and the headteacher and staff have taken the school way beyond the targets set by the previous inspection. All developments are vibrant and seek to meet the increasing complexity of need some pupils bring to the school. Leadership encourages a self-reflective approach from staff; the headteacher leads by example and all staff enthusiastically choose to enrich their own skills and qualifications. Parents and carers are keen to become governors and their view of the direction the school is taking is overwhelmingly positive. Management is precise and well structured. Premises are constantly being reviewed and staff are always

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involved in the decision making. All changes, if they match the strict criteria of the development plan, are embedded or the plan 'goes back to the drawing board'. Successful innovation and this energised desire to review and embed give this school outstanding capacity for improvement.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

At the time of the inspection, there were five full-time children in the Reception class. Well-planned home visits help to establish an excellent understanding of each child's needs and secure the confidence of parents and carers. They are encouraged to be part of their children's transition into school, which ensures children settle well. Staff who work in the Early Years Foundation Stage are fully trained for the age range and the children's complexity of need. Quality arrangements to safeguard the children's welfare at all times are outstanding. Planning for the Early Years Foundation Stage framework is fully in place. The learning environment is secure; it incorporates good play facilities and is physically comfortable. The limited space for the full range of outside play is identified as a plan for action.

Learning is very well organised and planned, fully reflecting a very structured and detailed assessment and recording system that meticulously identifies the smallest steps of progress. Excellent teaching assistants and teachers work seamlessly to establish fun-filled activities to engage the children. Music and singing introduce the concept of taking turns and most children enjoy counting, for example, as the speckled frogs were hopped into the cardboard pond. There are challenging opportunities for independent and guided learning with a continual focus on communication skills and personal

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development. Each member of staff has a child they support and so can seize both planned and unplanned opportunities for development; they encourage children to make use of their senses to extend learning. Lunchtime is a stimulating social occasion, when some children are keen to try to feed themselves, and with constant reassurance, repetition and rewards from staff, as happy children they successfully make progress.

The strong links with parents and carers are consolidated through the beautifully annotated photographs in the children's learning journey. This book captures images of specific learning during the school day. Dynamic leadership and management are shared between the teacher in charge and the deputy headteacher. Regular team meetings and sharing of information ensure children's individual needs and successes are known to all.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

**Views of parents and carers**

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly pleased with their children's progress. They all expressed a good involvement with decisions made by the school. Parents and carers interviewed at the gate explained how the school had completely changed their children's lives enabling them to be proud of what they achieved in line with their needs. One parent explained, 'This school is fantastic!'. Many posed questions such as, 'Why can't we have more schools like Danecourt?' and 'Why have I had to wait so long to have my son placed here, where he needs to be ' if equality of opportunity means anything?'. There is good representation of parents and carers on the governing body ensuring they are involved in strategic planning. Parents and carers have many opportunities to make their views heard. This encourages their confidence to comment ' they know they will be taken seriously. The informative website designed by a governor provides additional information to the newsletters and notices displayed. Parents and carers feel involved from the time their children start at the school because of home visits, their access to teachers and the excellent family support from the Home School Support Worker.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Danecourt Community School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 115 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	90	2	7	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	87	3	10	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	74	7	23	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	61	10	32	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	81	6	19	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	74	5	16	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	81	6	19	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	70	8	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	84	5	16	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	65	9	29	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	74	6	19	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	84	5	16	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	97	1	3	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



8 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Danecourt Community School, Gillingham, ME8 6AA

I am writing to say thank you for being so happy and welcoming when my colleagues and I came to look at your work and the wonderful activities that are happening in your school. There are so many colourful notice boards around the school and I know some of you enjoy looking for pictures of yourself and your work on those wall displays. We particularly enjoyed the singing assembly. You have fabulous voices and the actions for 'roll the bobbin up' were great fun.

We could see how hard you and your teachers were working. We saw in your folders how you were trying to improve your communication skills, your mathematics and computer work, and all the new skills you were learning about looking after yourselves and making friends. We agree with you and your families that your school is a very exciting place to be because of all the excellent resources you have to help your learning. We know that your very dedicated, kind teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff, site staff and your cooks are all part of the happy family at Danecourt Community School and make it a very special place.

We thought you would like to know what we have suggested that your teachers could do to make your good school even more successful:

- To create enriched curriculum opportunities so that you are able to have an even better match to your needs to enhance your learning.
- To make sure that all of the teaching is of the best so you will learn well.
- To develop parent-friendly discussions and documents so that everyone can understand how the school aims to raise the achievement of all children now and in the future.

I hope you have a very happy term with lots of exciting activities.

Yours faithfully

Lynne Kauffman

Lead Inspector

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