

The Dales School

Morton-on-Swale, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 9QW

Inspection dates 6–7 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid progress in all areas of their development as a result of excellent relationships and partnership work between staff, parents and health professionals.
- Pupils make excellent progress in their communication, literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are cared for exceptionally well and staff know their individual support needs and learning abilities very well. This ensures that work is planned so that each pupil can achieve their very best.
- Teaching is almost always outstanding and never less than good. Teachers, teaching assistants and health professionals work as highly effective teams. They bring a wealth of skills and knowledge to their planning of highly enjoyable activities.
- A majority of students in the post-16 provision has joined from other schools. They settle quickly and enjoy a curriculum which helps them to develop and practise skills in other settings as well as in school. Teaching assistants make an invaluable contribution to students' learning and their personal development.
- Pupils behave extremely well and are keen to learn in lessons. They feel very safe and happy in school because they enjoy trusting and mutually respectful relationships with staff and school friends.
- The headteacher and her senior managers provide outstanding leadership. They are always looking for ways to make the provision even better. They have devised a system to assess pupils' very small steps of progress more precisely. This enables staff to plan individualised targets for pupils which are incorporated into every lesson plan. However, in a few lessons, it is not always clear what subject learning is to take place.
- The Dales School is highly regarded in the community and has developed strong relationships with other providers to broaden the curriculum it can offer. The school contributes exceptionally well to the development of skills and knowledge in other schools through its outreach service.
- The governing body makes an outstanding contribution and supports and challenges senior leaders highly effectively. As a result of exceptional leadership The Dales School has an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by teachers and advanced teaching assistants. Two of the observations were paired observations with senior leaders.
- There were insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to be able to take them into account but information from the school's own parental questionnaire was considered.
- The inspectors met with groups of pupils, with senior leaders and members of the governing body. They talked to families and friends of pupils at a 'scone-shop' and 'swap-shop' community event in the school hall. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority and a telephone conversation took place with the executive principal of the partner college.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and visited a session at the college. A number of documents was reviewed including those relating to the school's assessment and target-setting, school development planning, performance management of staff, safeguarding, behaviour management and outreach work. Evidence of pupils' work in portfolios and learning journals was also seen.
- Questionnaires were returned from 24 members of staff.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Irene Lavelle

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- All pupils at The Dales School have a statement of special educational needs. Pupils have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities. A minority has additional conditions such as autism spectrum disorders. A majority has significant medical and health needs.
- Students in the post-16 provision have a broader range of special educational needs including moderate learning difficulties. A majority of the post-16 students joins from other schools. Half of the school's pupils are in the post-16 department.
- Pupils are drawn from across a wide geographical area and often travel long distances to and from school.
- At present all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. (Pupil premium is extra government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of military personnel.)
- Students in the post-16 department attend regular sessions at Northallerton College where the school has a base. In addition, the school has partnerships with a number of other provisions for individual and group placements as appropriate.
- The school provides outreach advice to almost 30 mainstream schools, both to develop expertise in providing for pupils with severe learning difficulties and to support the assessment and use of communication aids.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all lessons have a clear learning outcome for the subject.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Due to their disabilities and special educational needs, children have very low attainment on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage. All children make very rapid progress because staff prepare exceptionally well with parents for their admission to school.
- Pupils make progress in very small steps because the majority remains at the very early stages of learning. Nevertheless, the excellent system for assessment which the school has developed demonstrates that pupils make and exceed expected progress in literacy and numeracy as well as in other aspects of their development. Pupils achieve particularly well in their physical, social and emotional development because teachers ensure that these aspects are an integral part of every lesson.
- The development of pupils' communication skills is in everything the school does. A wide range of strategies is used including sign, symbols, real objects and switches. These help pupils to express their needs and wishes. They recognise familiar routines and show pleasure in anticipating what will come next.
- Staff teams meet together frequently to share views and assess the progress pupils make against their individualised targets for communication, thinking skills and personal social development. The assessment of what pupils have learnt of subjects is not always so clear. However, the shared assessments enable staff to plan very precisely what they want each pupil to achieve in the following lessons.
- The school's leaders keep a close check on the performance of individual pupils, including the very small numbers who are eligible for the pupil premium. The needs of each individual pupil are paramount and every pupil is provided with an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The school has excellent partnerships with health professionals. Joint planning and implementation of programmes by school staff ensures that pupils' health care and mobility needs are met exceptionally well on a daily basis.
- Students who join the post-16 department from other settings have a broader range of special educational needs. Although none is likely to achieve nationally expected awards, all students are given an opportunity to gain an external qualification at an appropriate level.
- Personal targets are set in discussion with each student to reflect what they want to achieve. Students know their targets and are proud to talk about the progress they are making towards them. They make exceptionally good progress in their personal, life and social skills. A minority can use their numeracy and literacy skills well. For example, in a planning lesson for food technology, a group of students was able to make a shopping list and work out their accounts.
- Post-16 students benefit from the opportunities offered through the school's excellent partnerships with other providers. These enable students to develop an interest in a wider range of subjects than could be provided on site. They practise independent travel, use a cafeteria with students from the mainstream college, have opportunities for work experience in jobs which interest them and are prepared exceptionally well for their future lives.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Outstanding teaching ensures that pupils make outstanding progress in different subjects and in the development of their personal and basic skills, across all age groups.
- In the school's own questionnaire, parents clearly state that they believe their children are well-taught and are often amazed at what they are able to achieve in a short space of time at the school.
- Teachers and teaching assistants at The Dales School are highly skilled practitioners. Although most pupils in the school require support to explore new things, teaching assistants know when to stand back and let pupils try things for themselves.

- Teachers plan lessons in a rich and varied curriculum which is well-matched to the needs and interests of pupils, though the subject-specific learning intentions are not always as clearly identified as the individual pupil's learning intentions. Pupils want to join in and learn because staff know how to make lessons enjoyable for them.
- Lesson planning is very linked well to pupils' individual targets and carefully judged to ensure that pupils can enjoy success but be challenged to achieve even more. For example in a lesson jointly planned between the teacher and a music specialist, pupils in the primary department enjoyed being able to control music through a soundbeam with very small movements, while being encouraged to use new movements to trigger different sounds. The glee and anticipation were unmistakable.
- Post-16 students benefit from some high quality specialist teaching at the nearby college, especially in creative arts subjects. The Dales staff provide excellent support in these sessions.
- Teaching assistants make an outstanding contribution to the progress pupils and students make. They enthusiastically participate in training to ensure that they have the necessary skills to support and advise pupils and to prepare and teach group sessions well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The Dales School is a very happy community. Teachers and teaching assistants are very responsive to pupils' moods and needs and provide them with routines which help them to settle to the day's learning.
- Pupils demonstrate that they feel safe and happy because of these trusting relationships. As a result behaviour is excellent and pupils make outstanding progress in building their confidence and resilience. Staff are very skilled at managing occasional poor behaviour associated with pupils' special educational needs, using calming and distracting techniques, so that physical interventions are rarely needed.
- Parents know that the school keeps their children safe and well cared for. Attendance is good, although there are high levels of medical and health needs in the school.
- Older students are encouraged to develop their independence. They learn about keeping themselves safe on the Internet and out in the community. They say there is no bullying in school but know that if they have any concerns they can talk to an adult in confidence. They are confident that, if they are upset about anything, staff will do everything possible to help them.
- From an early stage pupils plan for life after school. Through skilful questioning, students are able to express their wishes and aspirations for the future in extremely high quality personalised planning reviews.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils enjoy a wealth of rich experiences, participating in music, dance and drama productions and in PE and sports competitions. They enjoy achieving food hygiene and first aid certificates and organising a Christmas party for older people. They learn about other cultures by raising funds for a sponsored child in South America and holding a Diwali week. Pupils have many opportunities to enjoy 'wow' moments such as when horse-riding or enjoying a visit from a theatre group in full costume.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and her management team provide exceptional leadership to the school. They have not only maintained standards since the previous inspection, but have continued to grow and develop the skills and knowledge of staff to ensure a consistently outstanding quality of teaching and learning. This is achieved through rigorous but supportive checks on performance which are linked to continuing professional development exceptionally well.
- In this small school, all teachers have additional responsibilities which increase as they move up the pay scale. All members of staff willingly participate in the substantial range of training

offered and keep portfolios of their own achievements. Staff feel very well supported by senior leaders and the responses in the staff questionnaires demonstrated their pride in working in The Dales School and their commitment to its continuing development.

- The school has not been satisfied with available procedures for assessing pupils' progress and has developed its own, to demonstrate better the very small steps of progress which pupils make and to set targets to challenge them to achieve further. The school's expertise in assessment is being shared with other similar schools.
- The school's leaders are constantly looking outwards to share expertise with other providers and to learn from them. The school is commissioned by the local authority to provide outreach support and guidance to mainstream schools who have pupils with severe learning difficulties or who use communication aids. This work is regarded extremely highly by both the local authority and by the partner schools. Research and development are strong aspects of the school's work and the school has achieved the Research Charter Mark. The school is rightly proud of the range of professional documentation it produces to support all aspects of its outreach, partnership and professional development work.
- Links with parents are exceptionally strong. Parents feel very well-informed about what their children are learning in school and able to ask for help and support from staff when they are experiencing difficulties with their children at home.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very involved in the life of the school. They have recently reviewed and changed their structure and new governors have been recruited who represent the school's partners and parents. They have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities with a comprehensive induction programme. They keep themselves well-informed about the progress pupils make and understand the links between teachers' performance and pay. They have agreed to the secondment of a teacher to the School Sports Partnership and another to delivering outreach guidance, recognising the benefits to the school as well as to other settings. Governors regularly attend training and keep themselves up to date by having links into classes and aspects of the school's work. The Chair of the Governing Body undertook a case review by following a student through his three years in the post-16 department, attending reviews and liaising with parents in order to gain knowledge at first hand. Governors ensure that resources, including the small amount of pupil premium funding, is used to best effect. Safeguarding is paramount and kept under constant review.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	121771
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	425972

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Chubb
Headteacher	Hanne Barton
Date of previous school inspection	14 December 2010
Telephone number	01609 772932
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