Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Dales School

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

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

The Dales School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Positive relationships between pupils and staff ensure pupils are safe, well cared for and happy. Pupils settle quickly and engage well with staff. Staff provide nurture and support. Pupils confidently approach staff for help and communicate their needs.

The school sets high expectations and is ambitious for all pupils. Pupils experience a highly personalised curriculum. They get the support they need from dedicated staff. A 'can-do' attitude develops pupils' resilience and perseverance, preparing them for life in and beyond school. Well-established routines support pupils throughout the school day and in lessons. Adults provide gentle encouragement and offer choices to support pupils in moving on quickly. Pupils achieve well.

Pupils are comfortable and familiar with the well-designed environment. The wide range of provision areas provide sensory and movement opportunities. Pupils manage their feelings well. They are ready to learn. Throughout the school day, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and engage fully in all aspects of school life.

Pupils know about eating healthily and the importance of regular exercise. Enrichment opportunities such as visits and wider experiences through the 'suitcase for life' enhance learning. Parents and carers value the care and support their children receive. They appreciate the half-termly parent group.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to improve the curriculum. It has created a broad curriculum which covers the full range of national curriculum subjects. Pupils follow well-established pathways that combine academic ambition with support for their complex needs. These pathways build knowledge logically over time. The

personalised curriculum across all pathways seamlessly blends therapeutic and academic approaches. Staff provide guidance and support at every stage of learning. Carefully structured activities, along with multi-sensory approaches, engage pupils' interest.

Well-trained staff, along with support from external agencies, work closely with pupils to accurately assess their needs on entry. All pupils have a range of support plans, which set out the detailed support they need to help them learn and to keep them safe. Staff follow these consistently to meet pupils' needs with precision and skill.

The school has recently changed the way it assesses pupils' outcomes. This has enabled teachers to check more accurately how well pupils learn and identify specific gaps in their learning. From these checks, the next steps in learning are identified accurately. These are matched carefully with pupils' individual support plans. However, the school recognises that there is more to do to ensure that these are aligned better with the knowledge and skills pupils need to learn, to inform future teaching.

Across all pathways, communication is a high priority. The communication curriculum ensures pupils access the wider curriculum. Pupils frequently practise communication skills. They use communication devices confidently to enhance learning. There is a consistent approach to developing pupils' language. Clear, precise language is pronounced correctly and clearly for pupils. Staff are engaging and animated when they speak to pupils. They use regular signing to support pupils' understanding. Songs and rhymes are a key part of daily routines. Pupils engage enthusiastically with familiar stories. Teachers verbally retell stories using meaningful language. Physical resources, pictures and sensory approaches are used effectively to develop pupils' understanding.

Pupils quickly learn to follow the school's routines. Staff expertly use approaches such as pictures and objects of reference to help children recognise changes in activities throughout the day. These approaches are effective throughout the school, including in the sixth form. Pupils are well prepared to manage transitions during the school day.

Attendance has improved over time. There is a personalised approach to supporting and managing attendance. The school, alongside external agencies, works closely with families to ensure pupils attend regularly and their needs are met consistently.

Preparation for adulthood begins when children join the school. Pupils engage in outdoor activities, the student council and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils, including students in sixth form, receive independent careers advice and gain work experience. They enjoy applying their cookery skills when running the school's pop-up scone shop and happy café.

Staff, leaders and governors work with determination to secure continued whole school improvements in the best interests of the pupils. Priorities for improvement are the right ones. Governors are proud of the school. Their oversight of school improvement is systematic and rigorous. Staff feel well supported by leaders. Staff appreciate the time given to manage their workload. There is a strong team approach with initiatives such as staff breakfast, book club and a 'shout out' board to support well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's work to improve the curriculum, including the use of assessment, is ongoing. In some areas of learning, the knowledge and skills pupils learn are not aligned well enough to the carefully thought-out assessment processes. The school should continue its work to ensure that the content of the curriculum and the use of assessment are aligned so teachers can use this information effectively to inform future teaching.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in April 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use Ofsted Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	121771
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	10323002
Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Neil Irving
Headteacher	Ann-Marie Ellis
Website	www.thedalesschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 April 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school provides specialist education for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities, autism, multi-sensory impairment, speech, language and communication needs and physical disabilities.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds. There are currently no pupils on roll of this age.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not use any alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and lead practitioner for special educational needs and/or disabilities. They also met with the lead for behaviour, the school business manager and some curriculum leaders.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their views of the school, behaviour and safety.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors met with staff to gather their views of the school. They also considered the responses from the Ofsted survey for staff.

Inspection team

Nicola Beaumont, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Barton	Ofsted Inspector

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