

# Dee Banks School

Dee Banks, Sandy Lane, Chester, Cheshire CH3 5UX

## Inspection dates

15–16 November 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Requires improvement</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The new headteacher is sweeping positive changes across the school. She has rapidly strengthened school systems to drive up pupils' achievements and raise standards.
- Governors have not always been provided with the necessary information to appropriately challenge leaders. As a result, the school has drifted and standards have fallen.
- Leaders do not provide tailored professional development for staff or ensure that the best practice is shared across the school to raise standards.
- Procedures for managing the performance of teachers have not been rigorous enough in the past. Recently improved systems are in place, poised to raise standards across the school.
- Staff know their pupils well and anticipate their needs so that barriers to learning are removed. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress.
- The school environment and accommodation do not consistently support pupils' achievement or development.
- Post-16 provision ensures that students' needs are well met and they are well prepared for their next steps.
- Parents speak warmly about the devotion and care that are wrapped around their children to ensure that they thrive and achieve.
- Pupils are safe, well cared for and enjoy positive relationships with staff. They behave well.
- All pupils benefit from high levels of care for their physical and health needs. Therapists and staff work cohesively together and significantly contribute to pupils' achievement and personal development. Pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties are exceptionally well supported.
- Leadership of the early years is not effective in ensuring that children make a good start in their learning.
- Some teachers do not set work at the right level to challenge pupils to do their best.
- Some teachers do not ensure that pupils' skills in reading and phonics are developed effectively.
- Leaders do not consistently monitor and evaluate strategies to further develop pupils' reading skills.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so they lead to exemplary outcomes for pupils by:
  - ensuring that pupils are consistently provided with work that stretches them to do their best
  - providing staff with even more effective professional development that is bespoke to their needs
  - sharing the skills of the school’s best teachers more widely across the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - leadership in the early years foundation stage is sharpened so that effective actions raise standards and accelerate children’s achievement
  - systems for holding staff to account for pupils’ performance help to raise standards across the school
  - the school environment and accommodation consistently support high-quality teaching and learning.
- Improve pupils’ phonic development and their reading skills by:
  - ensuring that senior leaders monitor and evaluate the strategies used to develop pupils’ reading skills across the school
  - providing identified staff with further training on how to successfully teach phonics so that pupils’ progress in reading accelerates.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The new headteacher is highly skilled and has high expectations of the pupils in her care. She has quickly established her leadership team with an unwavering focus on ensuring that all staff work collaboratively to drive up standards. She has swiftly established an accurate view of teaching and learning and is resolutely driving positive change across the school.
- A spirit of inclusion and equality pervades the school. Leaders capitalise on positive working relationships with staff, parents and all linked professionals. They ensure that pupils' development is at the heart of all actions.
- Leaders have devised a good range of activities that provides pupils with many opportunities to develop new skills and to acquire knowledge in a variety of subjects. They ensure that the curriculum is designed to match individual pupils' ages and interests. There is a strong focus on developing communication and social skills, alongside developing literacy and mathematical skills. Leaders do not shy away from providing some challenging curriculum subjects such as German and computing.
- Exciting outdoor and indoor activities, residential trips, and musical and sporting opportunities encourage pupils to test themselves and enjoy warm relationships with others. These activities and experiences promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well.
- Leaders ensure that the school's system for keeping an eye on how well pupils are doing is accurate because it is based on sound, moderated and validated assessment.
- Leaders take great care to ensure that any end-of-year group changes are carefully planned, with clear communication between teachers. Information regarding pupils' learning styles, assessments and health and welfare is transferred effectively to the next teacher. Parents and pupils are provided with a plethora of opportunities to meet new staff and visit their new classroom environment so that they feel reassured and familiarised. This approach ensures that individual learning plans continue to boost learning and ensures pupils' continued progress.
- There are excellent links with parents and carers. They appreciate the care and devotion from staff and the regular updates and clear communication through diaries, emails and video footage. There is a high take-up by parents and carers for the annual reviews of their children's progress. Parents and carers are very happy with the guidance they receive as to how they can support their children at home. The school has plans to provide a family liaison officer to further support and strengthen home-school links.
- The school provides its pupils with good careers guidance and advice, which helps them to make informed choices about their next steps.

- Leaders ensure that a wide range of therapists are used very well to support pupils' development. A music therapist, speech and language therapist and physiotherapist all contribute vital information towards pupils' education, health and care plans and their annual progress reviews. These well-established experts provide individual pupils with well-planned support that develops their communication, motor and interactional skills, such as listening, turn-taking and sharing. Canine therapy is also used as a calming strategy for pupils, along with comfort and support.
- Leaders ensure that funding, such as the pupil premium, is used to good effect by providing additional opportunities for therapy for eligible pupils. The primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively to provide additional sport and movement classes for pupils. It is clear that the funding is making a positive difference.
- The local authority has re-established stronger connections to ensure that the school is effectively supported. Light-touch support in previous years did not prevent a decline in standards.
- Most teachers celebrate pupils' work and their achievements in classrooms and corridors. Sensory rooms are well equipped and the hydrotherapy pool provides good experiences for pupils who have profound and complex needs. However, the accommodation is not consistently bright and cheerful and some equipment is not always in full working order. Leaders have recognised the need to address some accommodation issues to support the rising numbers and changing needs of pupils.
- Although the school has declined in its overall performance, there is now a renewed determination among staff to improve standards across the school. Fresh leadership is providing energy and clear direction. The headteacher has tightened overall school systems and has correctly identified areas for school improvement. Teachers' performance is now reviewed more rigorously and improved systems to support teaching assistants are now in place. However, there is limited impact so far on raising standards.

## **Governance of the school**

- The governing body makes good use of the strengths, interests and expertise of individual governors, for example those who are experts in leadership and special educational needs. Governors have a clear view of what is working well and what needs improving. They monitor performance management for all staff and make sure that the quality of the staff's work is related to their pay and professional development.
- The governing body has established well-organised committees as appropriate platforms for leaders to provide information about the progress of pupils. They ask astute questions, and support and challenge leaders well.
- Governors monitor the budget carefully and have a detailed analysis of the spending of specific funding, such as the pupil premium. They know about its impact on the achievement of eligible pupils. Governors have ensured good financial planning, probity and sustainability.
- Governors have a strong understanding of the challenges that teachers face across the school and the variety of pupils' needs. They are passionate about improving pupils' life chances and supporting staff across the school.

- All governors receive regular training to keep them fully up to date with all aspects of child protection, and they ensure that all requirements for safeguarding are met.
- Governors relied too heavily on information given to them by leaders in the past and were not able to fully establish areas of decline across the school. New leadership has provided a sharp and realistic view of the school. Governors are re-focused and keen to ensure that the school bounces back to outstanding as quickly as possible.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The care and protection of pupils are high priorities in the school. Leaders make sure that all staff are trained in child protection and have also ensured that staff are alert and know how to identify and respond to pupils who are at risk. For example, all teachers have completed training on the 'Prevent' duty, increasing their knowledge of how to safeguard pupils from the threat of terrorism and radicalisation. Staff have been trained in protecting children from child sexual exploitation. School records show that when staff have cause to act, they have done so in an appropriate and timely manner. Staff engage effectively and appropriately with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that pupils are supported and safe.
- Speech therapists have provided additional training on swallowing and choking to ensure that staff are alert and informed about dysphagia.
- Staff check attendance closely and effectively monitor the welfare of all pupils. Any pupil absence is acted upon swiftly to ensure that pupils are safe.
- There are strong systems in place to make sure that staff and visitors are vetted to be able to work with pupils: procedures are fully in place and leaders and governors fulfil their statutory duties very effectively.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The climate for learning is calm and positive across the school. Most pupils are positive and keen to learn. Most staff have high, but realistic, expectations of all pupils and encourage them to develop independence as much as possible.
- Highly experienced and skilled teaching assistants are an asset to the school, providing effective input, continuity and stability. Communication between teachers and teaching assistants is effective. Teaching assistants are usually well briefed about their role in the classroom and work effectively with individuals and small groups.
- Staff have very strong partnerships with the school's therapists and enjoy the additional training and support that they frequently provide. Speech and language specialists have boosted staff knowledge on the use of specific communication strategies. As a result, nearly all staff are highly skilled in communication strategies.

- Leaders invest in weekly music therapy for identified pupils. This approach provides further opportunities for pupils to develop their motor skills and interactional skills. It also develops pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Inspectors saw pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties expressing clear enjoyment in their learning. Pupils were alert and animated, and developing responses through their engagement with instruments.
- Parents agree strongly that their children are well taught and are particularly pleased by their progress in personal development and communication skills.
- Pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties are exceptionally well cared for and developed across the school. Staff are highly astute in responding to their needs and ensure that learning environments support steps in their learning. Inspectors observed pupils being brought back into focus during a sensory lesson because staff were expertly attuned to pupils' responses.
- Teachers use a variety of effective communication methods across the school. In classrooms, visual timetables are displayed and pupils, in particular those who have autism spectrum disorder and communication difficulties, benefit from the use of pictures and symbols to aid communication. Approaches, such as signing and symbols or pictures, enable all pupils to express their views, make choices and indicate new knowledge or understanding.
- Teaching typically makes good use of interesting resources to trigger and maintain pupils' interest. Staff are skilled in checking pupils' learning by questioning them as to what they understand or have done. This ensures that most pupils make small but significant steps in progress. However, some activities are overly repetitive, and although secure and predictable, do not stretch pupils or provide any surprises that could move them on to the next step.
- Most staff work well together and ensure that pupils are catered for and that their barriers to learning are removed. In these lessons pupils make strong progress. However, some staff do not ensure that pupils are challenged and stretched to do their best. As a result, pupils' progress across the school is not exemplary.
- Staff assess and record pupils' progress frequently and accurately. A few staff do not use these assessments sufficiently well to provide suitable tasks to extend pupils' learning and provide additional stretch and challenge.
- The quality of teaching and learning has declined since the last inspection. This is because staff across the school have not been immersed in continuing to develop exemplary good practice. Professional development has not been sculpted around staff needs and over time their skills have become blunt. Furthermore, the skills of the school's best teachers are not shared effectively across the school.
- Some staff use positive and effective approaches to improving pupils' reading development. However, successful approaches are not consistently applied across the school. There is not a strong emphasis or a well-defined strategy for reading and phonics. Some staff are not highly skilled in how to teach phonics. As a result, a few pupils do not make the progress that they could in developing their reading skills.

- The school benefits from a range of good-quality resources to support pupils' learning, such as a sensory room, a hydrotherapy pool and a soft play area. However, some areas of the school are not well maintained and a few teachers do not take pride in their classrooms to ensure that pupils are provided with an environment that is conducive to learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Statutory requirements to keep pupils safe and secure are followed rigorously. All adults are alert to potential dangers and they know what to do if they have concerns. Every member of staff who responded to the questionnaire confirmed that pupils are safe.
- All staff take great care in ensuring that pupils are well cared for. The pupils are well supervised at all times of the day, from their arrival to leaving. A high adult presence maintains pupils' safety and welfare when pupils are not in the classroom. Pupils with medical needs are looked after exceptionally well, with clear support plans that are reflective of their needs. Adults manage the pupils' care effectively, for instance in moving and hoisting pupils who have severe and physical disabilities. Risk assessments for all aspects of the pupils' care are thorough and very well monitored.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and can explain how they have been taught about the safety of travel and strategies to stay safe in various situations. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum teaches pupils about body awareness and the concept of privacy. Bullying is not an issue and this was confirmed by school records and also when inspectors met with the school council.
- The school tries very hard to help pupils to recognise risky situations in the community and to understand how to deal with potential dangers. For instance, inspectors spoke to the student council and its members revealed that the school does a significant amount of work in alerting pupils to the risk of inappropriate use of the internet and social media.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. A positive atmosphere permeates the whole school because staff care about pupils' well-being, respect their dignity and genuinely enjoy working with them.
- Pupils have good relationships with staff and look to their assistants and teachers to help them. Their attitudes to learning are good. Pupils show particular enjoyment in the range of musical activities, such as the school choir and the sing-a-long activity held in the hall at the end of the school day.

- Pupils attend well where possible and enjoy school. The school takes all appropriate steps to maintain pupils' education if they are absent for medical care or if they are unwell. The school has recently tightened attendance procedures to further communicate the highest expectations of school attendance to all parents.
- Pupils who are able to vocalise are encouraged to laugh and smile, which creates a happy and vibrant atmosphere in and out of lessons. Challenging behaviour, such as agitated or anxious outbursts, is managed well by staff.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- The school has almost doubled in size since the last inspection and past leaders have not ensured a continued focus on developing teachers' skills. Consequently, teachers have been unable to maintain and replicate the exemplary levels of pupils' progress made in the last inspection.
- Pupils typically make good progress during their time in school. A large majority make the progress that is expected of them in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. As a result of their profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex additional needs, pupils' attainment at all stages of their education remains significantly below that of pupils in mainstream and some other special schools.
- There are no significant differences in the achievement of pupils from different backgrounds, or between the progress made by boys and girls. All pupils achieve equally well, including those who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils' communication skills progress well across the school because staff are well skilled and pupils benefit from additional speech and language therapy. Pupils' physical and fine motor skills improve rapidly because the therapists and support staff target these areas closely.
- Disadvantaged pupils supported by additional funding make progress that is at least in line with that of their classmates. Staff know their individual needs and barriers to learning well. Leaders ensure that they use the additional funding effectively to provide well-focused additional support and therapies that successfully help their learning and behaviour. Differences in pupils' achievements and those of their peers are negligible. No meaningful comparison is possible between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils and pupils nationally.
- Some pupils do not consistently make strong progress in reading because effective professional development is not yet in place to support staff in its delivery. Leaders have not always focused on evaluating the strategies used to improve reading and ensuring that they are having a strong impact.

### Early years provision

**Requires improvement**

- Since the last inspection, leadership of the early years foundation stage has altered and children are now not achieving as well as they once did. Current leadership of the provision has not ensured rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. There are not sufficiently high expectations for children and staff. Consequently, not all children make the progress that they should.

- Senior leaders have ensured that children's outcomes are moderated with those of other schools to ensure the accuracy of teachers' judgements. Some staff check children's learning routinely and they are adept at recording small steps of progress. These teachers adapt activities quickly in response to these achievements and so children are always presented with appropriate challenge. Inspectors saw this approach used by teachers of children who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The early years leader has not ensured that the best practice is shared across the provision.
- Systems to monitor and check staff performance are not sharp enough. As a result, the early years leader has an over-inflated view of teaching and learning and has not addressed some areas for improvement. Staff are not always provided with professional development that matches their needs.
- Children's development needs are not always highly supported. Some resources need refreshing to support and ignite children's learning.
- Reading and phonics are not well planned to ensure that all staff use the same effective strategies. The best practice in phonics and reading is not widely shared across the provision. As a result, not all children are well supported to improve their reading.
- Children enter Reception with starting points that are extremely below what is typical for their age due to their varied and complex learning needs. Staff ensure that children have individual learning programmes that detail how the provision intends to support their learning and personal development. Most children make the small steps expected towards their learning goals. Senior leaders ensure that additional funding is used well to support children in their development.
- Staff are vigilant in ensuring that children play and learn in a safe environment. Staff are skilled in paediatric first aid and have clear protocols in place for the use of mobile phones.
- Partnerships with parents and carers are a strength. Communication is frequent and children's work that is sent home is much appreciated by families. Good links with children's families enable staff to get a rounded picture of each child's needs prior to entering the setting.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- The newly embedded leadership and management of the sixth form are good because staff are well motivated to provide the best opportunities for the students in their personal and academic achievements. Students' needs are met with good levels of expertise and through planning, which are securely based on thorough and frequent assessments. Teachers are skilled in adapting their teaching to develop students' understanding and to ensure that they produce good-quality work.
- Older, more independent students, who are most likely to move on to college, are housed in a unique building that incorporates a more mature and self-reliant approach. Students have access to their own kitchen and common room to build confidence and future life skills. Students are encouraged to develop skills for independent living. They are provided with lessons and experiences in cooking, shopping and cleaning.

- Students follow a curriculum that is suitable for their starting points and abilities. Staff know students very well and ensure that the curriculum is shaped around their needs and future desires. All students receive independent careers advice and most students follow accredited courses, which helps to prepare them for the next steps in their lives.
- Teachers work hard to ensure that students develop secure basic skills of communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Students apply these skills during practical activities, college taster days and day trips to explore their local surroundings. Work placements are appropriately used to extend some students' understanding of the world of work.
- Students in the sixth form behave well and are safe. They engage well in activities to support their independence and social skills. Leaders ensure that there is a wide variety of clubs and activities to meet the needs of all students. These activities and experiences promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. They are encouraged to think of others and raise money for charity, for example, baking cakes and raising money through a Macmillan coffee morning.
- High numbers of students have the opportunity to attend a residential and develop their skills and experiences beyond the school. For example, students attended a three-day residential and experienced outdoor education programmes such as using a zip wire and white-water rafting. Some students also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. In doing this, they develop skills in orienteering, British sign language and bicycle maintenance. A tent is used on site to support and develop students with their camping skills.

## School details

Unique reference number	111494
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10001394

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Rosie Beach
Headteacher	Mrs Judith McGuinness
Telephone number	01244 981030
Website	<a href="http://www.deebanksschool.co.uk">www.deebanksschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk">head@deebanks.cheshire.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	18–19 October 2011

## Information about this school

- Dee Banks is a special school for children and young people between the ages of two and 19 who have severe and complex special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The majority of pupils have one of three conditions: profound and multiple learning difficulties; severe learning difficulties; or autism spectrum disorder. However, several pupils have learning difficulties across these categories and/or other conditions, such as a physical disability.

- There are significantly more boys on roll than girls and nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much lower than the average nationally.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below the national average.
- Some pupils generally live within Cheshire West and Chester, although a greater number travel from neighbouring local authorities.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

## Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and the chair and members of the governing body. Meetings were also held with a number of therapists based in the school. An inspector made telephone calls to two local authority officers.
- An inspector formally interviewed members of the student council to talk about their work and experiences. Inspectors also spoke to a wide range of pupils informally at break- and lunchtime. They also observed pupils' arrival and departure and their conduct and behaviour throughout the school day.
- An inspector listened to a range of pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school across a range of year groups and pupils' needs. Some observations of teaching and learning were undertaken jointly with the headteacher.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's policies, records relating to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding records and performance information. Inspectors also viewed some pupils' individual learning plans.
- Inspectors considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as four responses from parents on Ofsted's free-text service. Inspectors also met with seven parents to discuss their views of the school. Staff responses to the staff online questionnaires provided by Ofsted were also considered.

## Inspection team

Dawn Platt, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lisa Morgan

Ofsted Inspector

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