



Dee Banks School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111494
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278706
Inspection dates 19 October 2005 to 20 October 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs Frances Gander CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Dee Banks
School category	Community special		Sandy Lane
Age range of pupils	2 to 19		Chester, Cheshire CH3 5UX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01244 324012
Number on roll	69	Fax number	01244 346723
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs B Sherwood
Date of previous inspection	29 January 2001	Headteacher	Reverend Raymond Elliott

Age group 2 to 19	Inspection dates 19 October 2005 - 20 October 2005	Inspection number 278706
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

The school educates pupils and students who have severe or profound multiple learning difficulties and / or disabilities. They live in Chester and the surrounding rural and industrial areas. The social background of pupils is mixed. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is average for this type of school. The number of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups is very low. A third of the pupils have profound difficulties and some are supported by medical carers provided by the Primary Care Trust (PCT). The rest of the pupils have severe difficulties, including communication and language, and challenging behaviour. A quarter of the pupils in this last group have autism. This is an increase since the last inspection and the school now provides some separate teaching provision for these pupils. A few pupils attend local mainstream schools and, as such, are on the rolls of both schools.

The school provides outreach advice and support to mainstream schools and nurseries in the locality. Since the last inspection the school has had an unsettled time, including two periods where an acting headteacher was leading it. The present headteacher was appointed a year ago, and the deputy headteacher has been in place for six weeks. The school has Investors in People Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school is effective and offers good value for money. It meets the wide range of educational, behaviour and care needs of its pupils and students well. It provides them with many opportunities to make good progress, because they are taught well. The provision for the youngest children in the Foundation Stage is of very high quality. The extensive assessment and very well co-ordinated teamwork ensures that the children make good progress. Another outstanding strength lies in the extensive and purposeful links the school has with a wide variety of local schools so that pupils have educational opportunities outside school. In addition, the broad nature of experiences organised within the community for pupils to take part in also makes an excellent contribution, and has a considerable effect on the pupils' learning.

The new managers have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. An audit of the provision has informed the school's self-evaluation, and in a very short time improvements in priority areas have been made. The school's self-assessment was overgenerous in only one area; that being leadership and management. Leadership and management is good, but not outstanding as improvement is needed in the 16 -19 provision. The areas for improvement from the last inspection have been achieved, including the addition of new high quality classroom provision. However, during the unsettled intervening years, the improvements made in some areas, such as the targets set in Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), and to information and communication technology (ICT) have been lost. The quality and focus of the new management and the enthusiasm of the staff shows that the school has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the provision for pupils in Years 12 to 14 is satisfactory, but as it is not separate from that of younger pupils, the school could not evaluate how effective or efficient it was. The two classes for older pupils are distinctively different; one catering for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, while the other caters for the academically more able pupils, but they also include some pupils who are much younger. Appropriately each class is well taught by an experienced teacher and a team of classroom support assistants. There are too many students in one class, and no opportunity for a Year 11 pupil to move onto 'being a student' in a separate and more informal educational setting.

The school is implementing a satisfactory '14 -19 curriculum', and is part of a group of special schools in the authority who are focussing on this aspect of their provision. Work experience, links with other schools, or independence opportunities are well provided for each student. However, there is insufficient distinction between the curriculum and the range of external accreditation for those in Years 12 to 14, and those in Years 10 and 11. The achievements of students are therefore satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a separate provision and curriculum for students over the age of 16, and one that includes a greater range of external accreditation to celebrate their achievements.
- Improve the quality of the targets in the IEPs so they can be used more accurately to measure progress.
- Increase the amount of resources for ICT in classrooms.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspection findings confirm the school's self-evaluation of good achievement is accurate. Year-on-year from a very low starting level, they make measurable gains against the nationally accepted performance levels (P levels). Achievement for the pupils in the Foundation Stage is also good. For some pupils, as they learn the routines of school and begin to communicate their needs, it is outstanding. For others who have a great need of nursing care and support just so they are comfortable, progress varies according to their medical conditions. Despite the current weakness in the provision for Years 12 to 14, the assessment information that has been collated over the last five years shows that students up to now have made good progress year-on-year. They are currently gaining recognition for their achievements through a nationally recognised accreditation scheme. The pupils with autism, who are a fairly new group to the school, are making good progress. This is especially so in special provision for those in Years 7 and 8. This is because they are taught in a very small group in an appropriate classroom and by highly experienced staff, with very good use of pictorial communication. The progress of other learners who have autism is good, but occasionally when the number of adults in the classroom reduces, their attention wanders and their behaviour interferes with their learning.

There is no evidence of under achievement of pupils in different groups. The progress pupils and students make against the targets set in the IEPs is variable. Some of the strength in writing has been lost with the change of staff since the last inspection. The targets which are written in very specific terms, such as: 'to count to five', or to 'name four shapes', allow progress against these targets to be easily measured and tracked. From these progress can be evaluated. However, some targets are too vague and do not provide any information on which to judge the progress of an individual pupil.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The inspection judgement agrees with the school's judgement of good. The school successfully supports the personal development of pupils at all levels through its good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Conscious that the

school has an almost entirely white British community, it provides opportunities for pupils to be aware of other cultures and faiths. It also has long-established links with schools in Germany and Spain. The pupils are helped to adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles. They are encouraged to make a very positive contribution to the community, for example, by taking part in local drama productions, using the local leisure facilities, and fund raising for national events.

Pupils' behaviour is good. When instances of unacceptable behaviour occur it is the result of the pupils' and students' difficulties. It is managed very well by all staff so that pupils do not harm themselves or others. They are aware, within their limitations, of how their behaviour may have a consequence on others. In some situations, behaviour is outstanding, such as in the class for oldest pupils and at lunchtimes. This, along with pupils' and students' very positive attitudes to each other and to staff, allows them to work with and alongside pupils in mainstream schools in lessons and on joint projects. Pupils with profound disabilities and difficulties are very well supported by staff and medical carers so they take part in life and work of the school.

The improved attendance is good and is higher than the average for this type of school. Pupils and students enjoy attending school and are enthusiastic about their experiences and opportunities presented to them. This is the unanimous view of the parents.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school's judgement on the quality of its teaching and learning was accurately judged as 'good'. Observation of teaching has been a major part of the new management's audit of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Recent changes in the school staff have made it possible to recruit new staff with a range of experience and expertise. There is a good balance, with more experienced staff mentoring staff who are new to special education. Specific expertise in teaching pupils with autism, along with staff training, is having a very positive impact on the progress of this new and challenging group of pupils. However, in one of these classes when the number of adults is reduced, there are too many pupils to ensure that the high quality teaching can be maintained.

Strengths in teaching are teachers' knowledge of subjects and specialised teaching methods, which take very good account of the learning needs and styles of pupils and students. This enables pupils and students to make the progress that can be seen in the assessment records. In one lesson the teaching method selected to deliver the activity to half of the class did not sufficiently actively involve the support assistants and therefore pupils spent too long 'waiting for their turn'. There is very detailed planning for all lessons which highlights the different activities and expected learning for each pupil. The teamwork in the Foundation Stage and in some of the older classes for pupils with profound and multiple difficulties is seamless. Assessment is good; it

is especially strong in the Foundation Stage where it is continuous, well recorded, and is used to set meaningful small steps of learning.

Assessment of the responses of the pupils and their progress, in lessons, in some classes are not always recorded efficiently by the adults working with them. Consequently opportunities for this information to be used to contribute to the planning of the next lesson are sometimes lost.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good overall despite the weakness for older students. This weakness lies not in the range of learning experiences, but in the lack of a separate provision and the ability of the current arrangements to ensure that there will be sufficient scope for progression in learning in the future. The school's self evaluation was accurate in its judgement, but did not consider the curriculum for 16-19 as a separate provision. A particular strength of the curriculum lies in the Foundation Stage where excellent use is made of the environment outside school to support pupils' learning, communication, and knowledge and understanding of the world.

The curriculum is supported by an excellent range of out of school experiences. These are planned around specific learning opportunities and expected outcomes. In addition, the inclusion and shared learning experiences that the school has entered into with other schools has for many pupils widened their knowledge and had a beneficial impact on their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Overall, this is good. The school's evaluation of this aspect was that it was outstanding, and aspects of its provision, such as care, health and well-being are. The school is very diligent in this aspect, and procedures to safeguard pupils are extremely rigorous. Pupils and students are safe, secure and are well supported by a range of other professionals, such as therapists, medical staff, and the Connexions Service. This ensures that they, have access to learning, are comfortable, and are supported through times of stress and change. This has been maintained since the last inspection.

The reason why the school is not as good as it thought it was in this area is because it did not take into consideration the improvements needed to the targets in the IEPs. In addition, improvement of the long-term targets set for some Year 12 -14 students is needed so as to provide better support and guidance for future learning. The school has changed the system it uses to assess and record achievement and progress. It has adopted a more meaningful and accurate system and is able to analyse similarities and differences in progress made by different groups of pupils; thus providing more information for individual guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's view of its leadership and management was based on its management of change, its response to a traumatic and difficult situation, and the improvement of priority needs during the last year. This cannot be disputed, and as a result, the school is in a much better position to improve further. However, the management accept that the weakness in the separate provision for older students undermines its judgement.

Leadership and management are good. Since taking up his position as headteacher, a complete audit of strengths and weaknesses has taken place. This has informed the staff and governors of the priority areas for improvement, and also highlighted strengths on which the school can build. A new vision and management structure has evolved in the light of this self-evaluation. Weaknesses, as well as maintenance, have formed the basis of the school improvement plan. This focuses on raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and learning, the meeting of different needs, improving the environment, and realising this future vision. It could be strengthened by linking these more securely to the budget. The appointment of an experienced deputy headteacher has complemented the senior staffing and in the short time she has been in position her observations of the quality of some aspects has added to the self-evaluation. For example, the need to improve the quality of the IEPs had already been identified.

The improvements highlighted as needed at the time of the last inspection have all been completed but with many changes in leadership the policies have also changed. Hence, the present amount of resources for ICT is now below the recommended ratio for special schools. This requires attention so that pupils have more access to ICT as a means of accessing the curriculum and for communication.

The school seeks the views of parents, and now partner schools. It has historically had strong links and support from parents and this is evident in the very positive questionnaires returned to the school.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
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	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	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	3
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; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I recently visited you to find out about your school, what you did and how well your teachers are helping you with your learning.

I would like to thank you all for being friendly, polite, well behaved, and welcoming to your classes.

You attend a good school. Here is a list of all the things that I liked about your school:

- How well your headteacher and teachers know you.
- How attractive the school is and how well you look after it.
- How much you enjoy the lessons and activities the teachers plan for you, especially those with other schools and out in the community.
- How hard you try to get on well with everyone and do as you are asked.
- I agree with your parents that your headteacher and all the staff know you well and that you are well cared for at school.

This is what I have asked your school to do now, to make it even better:

- Provide a separate class for the students that are over the age of 16.
- Improve the wording used when writing your targets.
- Provide more computers for you to use in lessons.

I hope you carry on enjoying your time at school.