

# Dee Banks School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	111494
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325391
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Adrian Simm

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act. The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	76
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to under 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joyce Russell
Headteacher	Reverend Raymond Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	October 2005
School address	Dee Banks Sandy Lane Chester Cheshire CH3 5UX
Telephone number	01244 981030
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector visited nine lessons and held discussions with senior leaders, governors, staff, pupils, parents and health service staff. He observed the school's work and looked at assessment and tracking information, lesson observation records, safeguarding documents, key policies and 46 parent/carer questionnaires.

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

- How well the school assesses and checks on pupils' learning and progress and then plans and teaches lessons which meet their needs.
- How well pupils achieve.
- How well the school evaluates and builds on its effectiveness to improve its work with all of the pupils.

## Information about the school

The school educates pupils and students who have severe, profound, multiple or complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are a growing number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The nature of the learners' difficulties means pupils are working below national expectations. The social background of pupils is mixed; the number of pupils entitled to free school meals is around double the national average. Many pupils live a considerable distance from the school. Pupils join the school at varying points in their school life; some start in the Early Years Foundation Stage while others have previously attended mainstream schools or other special schools. A very small number speak English as an additional language. Local authorities look after a small number of pupils.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

### Main findings

Dee Banks is an outstanding school. It meets new challenges with the philosophy of 'how are we going to succeed?'. One teacher commented, 'there is no ceiling to what can be achieved for our pupils'. Parents' and carers' views are extremely positive; a very high majority thoroughly appreciate the difference that Dee Banks makes to their children's well-being. Typical of the responses to the inspection questionnaire, parents wrote that 'staff go above and beyond expectations to ensure children's happiness and enjoyment' and 'children's needs are met and exceeded to reach previously unattainable levels'. The inspection findings agree with these sentiments.

Pupils of all ages, backgrounds and with many different needs are supported, cared for and guided exceptionally well. This provides an atmosphere conducive to learning and enjoyment. As a result, and in relation to their needs, pupils' responses are excellent in how they show that they feel safe in school, develop healthy lifestyles, behave and contribute to the school and wider community. At a time when the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders is growing, staff have been proactive in undertaking training to meet this challenge very successfully. Extending techniques for communicating with pupils and providing ways in which they feel increasingly safe in their relationships and learning is paying off extremely well. For example, some older pupils now take action independently to calm themselves when they recognise tensions are growing. This is outstanding practice.

The school is working extremely hard to ensure pupils' learning and progress develop to be outstanding in the same way as their personal development. Currently, pupils achieve well in their work overall, and outstandingly in the Early Years Foundation Stage where every minute is a learning experience. Senior staff are extremely good at inspiring staff and pupils to overcome new challenges. There is high staff morale throughout the school, including amongst key partners such as the broad range of therapy and health service staff involved integrally in pupils' development. The school is very clear about its priorities and how it intends to build upon its successes. Since the previous inspection, staff have taken a series of well focused actions to enhance outcomes for pupils such as improving the curriculum, including an expansion of accredited courses for older pupils, enhancing information and communication resources throughout the school and ensuring much sharper individual and challenging targets for pupils to attain. The school is well placed to sustain this good improvement. Staff are focused on developing even further their assessments of how well the pupils are progressing so that they are clearer about

how well pupils and groups of pupils are doing in their work. The school is close to succeeding with this but more has yet to be done to ensure staff, governors, and parents or carers are as clear as possible about whether any pupils are underachieving or progressing more slowly than they should be. This is an example of where staff are striving for excellence and the school agrees that this area is a priority to ensure further academic improvement.

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

- Ensure that the data collected about pupils' overall outcomes in their work is:
  - presented in a clearer way for staff, governors and parents
  - used to even better effect to measure how well pupils are doing
  - used to plan purposefully for further improvement in learning and progress.

## How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1
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Pupils make good progress in their work from their various starting points. It is, in nearly all cases, better than would be expected given their needs. Very strong teamwork between teachers, teaching assistants and health professionals ensures that all pupils benefit equally well from everything the school has to offer.

Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders progress well in their class work and outstandingly well in their personal development and independence, especially as they get older. Their successful achievement is greatly aided by very small classes and very well trained staff. For example, in a science lesson, symbols were used well to enable pupils to predict about whether materials would burn or melt. Two pupils who stayed at the teacher's table showed high levels of interest and enjoyment. Another pupil who needed to move to an individual workstation to work independently, did so quietly and easily. A fourth pupil, who on this occasion was too distressed to work, was helped appropriately and, with high staffing levels, calmed down slowly and safely.

Pupils with very complex needs also progress well. They enjoy particularly their work with older more able pupils, for example, in the 'buddy dancing'. Very lively music and dance sequences, remembered extremely well by the more able, allowed them to weave intricate patterns to music as they pushed their buddies in wheelchairs around the dance floor. They relive dance movements experienced on their trips to London shows and plan extremely well for future performance. An extremely good example of equal opportunities enjoyed by all involved; smiles and eye movement from those with more complex needs indicating their awareness and participation in the dances. Communication and numeracy skills in counting dance steps and clapping rhythms contributed very well to the broad spread of skills taught.

Pupils arrive in the morning ready for the day. Parents comment that their children cannot wait to get to school and their enjoyment on arrival is clear. As a result,

attendance is good and has improved over the last three years. The school uses pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well as one of the keys to unlocking potential. Work in art and music contributes strongly to pupils' creativity and emotional well-being. Many pupils, regardless of age, attend mainstream schools or colleges for part of their learning which adds to their experiences extremely well and contributes intrinsically to their development of greater independence.

Health, safety, behaviour and community spirit are outstanding and, at times, can be seen together, for example, when older pupils prepare their own lunch and serve to visitors. These elements of personal development, when linked to more academic skills, prepare pupils well for the future. The school seeks accreditation both as a target to develop further and as a measure of its success and, in recent years, has gained the International Schools Award, Activemark, Sportsmark and, very recently, specialist school status for communication and interaction. The school does not rest on its laurels but constantly seeks way to build further upon pupils' overall outstanding personal development and good progress in lessons.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

## The quality of the school's work

The school is rich in data which it collects on pupils' individual levels of work and more recently, on how well different groups of pupils are doing. Since the last inspection, much smarter targets are now set in pupils' individual education plans, which are shared regularly with parents and carers. Parents spoken to during the inspection commented on how much clearer they are now about their children's successes against these targets. The school uses this information and other detailed knowledge it has of pupils' needs to match pupils to teaching groups which best optimise their chances of success. Staff know their pupils needs extremely well which helps pupils to feel secure and thus learn well. The school has worked very hard in

<sup>1</sup> Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

cooperation with another similar school to try and moderate teachers' assessments of their pupils' work. This was to improve accuracy of levels assessed and to try and analyse more exactly how well the pupils were doing; to flag those progressing very well, those who could be progressing better and the few who might be underachieving. The school agrees that more work is still to be done in analysing and simplifying this data so it is clearer what else teachers need to do in lessons to help some pupils achieve even more.

Teaching is good; some outstanding elements were seen during the inspection in the Early Years Foundation Stage, buddy dancing and with the personal development of the more able students in the sixth form. Teachers use their very good knowledge of pupils' needs to plan and support activities to ensure pupils are successful in their work and thus flourish and grow in confidence. Staff respond quickly to situations where pupils need extra help such as those currently moving through adolescence who are wrestling with their emotions and physical changes. Specific lessons supported by the school's health adviser are well underway and, to date, proving successful. The best lessons focus on pupils' speech and communication skills as well as other subject content. The curriculum is suitable for pupils' ages and stages of development.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

## How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders, staff and governors are very clearly dedicated to the pupils: to their progress and personal development in school, in the community and at home. The school works with pupils with a broad range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and promotes equality in learning exceptionally well. A variety of opportunities to test out parents' and carers views are taken, such as through questionnaires at various times of the year and the annual review meetings of pupils' statements of special educational needs. These are generally well attended by parents and carers.

Senior leaders provide extremely clear direction for the school and facilitate change by ensuring all staff know the school's priorities for development and the part they can play in driving the school forward. Middle managers take their responsibilities seriously and teamwork abounds. Governors take an active and effective part in school life, trust the judgements of the headteacher but equally ask challenging questions where necessary. Appropriate safeguarding and safety measures, such as risk assessments and fire practice evacuation records were in place at the time of the inspection. Community cohesion strategies are impacting well within the school curriculum, for example, in understanding other faiths and cultures. Also, locally, for example, in projects where pupils helped the local authority ensure neighbourhood facilities were designed suitably for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

and further afield in their work through the International Schools Award. The school spends much time in understanding their pupils' needs including in the wider community, although systematic evaluation of this is only just about to start.

Staff are deployed effectively in support of pupils' needs and the school offers good value for money; this is not yet outstanding given pupils' learning and progress have yet to match the high levels of personal development.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Staff work extremely well together and ensure learning is in very small steps. From the very earliest age, pupils are helped to feel comfortable and encouraged to learn. The high staffing levels ensure that the broad range of needs exhibited by children in the group is very well catered for. The small suite of very well resourced rooms offers a wide range of opportunities that include sensory facilities and access to good outdoor learning environments.

While provision for social and personal development is extremely strong, so, too, is the drive for academic progress. A numeracy lesson during the inspection stretched each child's thinking at their own level with much fun through action songs and other practical activities. Staff struck an excellent balance between focused adult-led activities and individual and group work that followed it, which offered a degree of personal choice, but was also linked carefully to the lesson outcomes expected. Staff are quick to notice when a child has achieved something worth celebrating.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is extremely well led and managed. Strong links with mainstream nurseries keep staff abreast of new initiatives. Very effective partnerships with a range of therapists are integral to children's all-round development. Excellent support for children's communication to enable them to understand more fully the world around them has been sustained since the last inspection.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
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What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	1
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1

## Sixth form

Since the last inspection, a separate sixth form has been developed. Accommodation allows for both work in a classroom and more social settings for preparation and serving of meals and quieter activities. More able sixth form students thrive on the broad range of opportunities for work experience, charity work, links with local colleges and residential experiences, all of which allow them to transfer their skills from one setting to another. Learning and progress are good and reflected in the increasing number and breadth of units of accreditation through the Assessments and Qualifications Alliance. Successes in subject and vocational units have increased by half in each of the years since the last inspection. Accreditation of skills via other pathways is used flexibly such as the Equals 'Moving on' and the Duke of Edinburgh Schemes.

The quality of teaching, and leadership and management of the sixth form, is good. There is an effective team of staff who recognise there is a shade more work to do in providing work related learning for those students with the most significant difficulties. The school has plans in place to address this through their newly acquired specialist school status.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

Replies to the inspection questionnaire were received from parents and carers of over half of the pupils. The vast majority who replied are pleased with the quality of education and care provided. Comments included, 'excellent school which is supportive and helpful', and, 'pupils' speech and signing are amazing', and, 'very lucky to be in such a caring environment'. An extremely small number of parents indicated that they thought the school could do more to support pupils' healthy lifestyles, manage better pupils' behaviour and improve pupils' progress. On balance, and given the nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the inspection judges these areas of school life to be generally good to outstanding.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- 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.
- Achievement:** an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- 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.



16 February 2009

Dear Children and Students

Inspection of Dee Banks School, CH3 5UX

I really enjoyed meeting so many of you when I visited your school this week. Thank you for being so welcoming and for showing me just how well your school helps you to learn and grow up. Thank you to all of you in the sixth form who prepared and served me lunch. Your company at the dinner table was really appreciated.

These are some of the things I found out from listening to you, talking to your teachers and to some of your parents and watching your lessons.

- All of the adults in the school really care about how well you are doing.
- Arriving at school in a morning, you look ready to enjoy the day.
- You all try really hard to do you best.
- You get on very well together and help each other in all sorts of ways – well done to the buddy dancers.
- From the Early Years Foundation Stage to the sixth form, all of your teachers make sure the work planned for you is just right and full of fun.
- The leaders of your school are always looking for ways to make your school even better.

I have asked your school to be just a little clearer in checking how well you are progressing in your work. I am sure you will keep working hard and enjoying school.

If some of the older pupils could help explain my letter to those who cannot yet read it, that would be really good of you. Your teachers might help also with this.

Best wishes for the future

Adrian Simm  
Lead inspector

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