

Inspection of a good school: Dee Banks School

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

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 March 2022

Outcome

Dee Banks School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils arrive at Dee Banks School each morning with smiles on their faces. They enjoy coming to school and said that they feel happy and safe there. Pupils are friendly and welcoming. They said that they like their teachers and love being with their friends.

Pupils behave well and they are helped to do this by members of staff who understand their individual needs. Any incidents of bullying or conflict between pupils are quickly dealt with and resolved effectively by staff.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well. Pupils benefit from an interesting curriculum. Pupils learn most parts of the curriculum successfully.

Pupils benefit from the many opportunities that leaders provide to prepare them for adult life. For example, children in early years develop their communication skills and independence through a wide range of activities. Students in the sixth form learn important life skills, such as shopping and cooking. They think for themselves and speak up confidently.

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

Leaders have adopted a curriculum that is designed well and ordered logically. The curriculum prepares pupils to be as independent as possible. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, learn to solve problems, communicate their wishes and interact with other people.

Most pupils develop their knowledge successfully over time and achieve well. Students in the sixth form are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and they make successful transitions to adulthood. Children in early years learn the skills and knowledge that they need to help them move confidently to their next stage of their education.

Leaders and staff identify the needs of pupils very well. Teachers have adopted a personalised approach to designing learning for pupils, considering a range of different factors. These factors include what pupils know and can do and what they should learn. This approach means that the learning needs of every pupil are considered by staff. However, on occasion, links between the curriculum and the learning designed by teachers are unclear. This means that pupils' learning is sometimes not organised in logical steps.

Leaders have appropriate and effective systems in place to check that pupils are progressing well through the curriculum. For example, they meet regularly with teachers to check on pupils' learning. That said, from time to time, some teachers do not use assessment information sufficiently well to plan the next steps in pupils' learning.

For the most part, teachers select appropriate activities and approaches to help pupils learn successfully. For instance, teachers use music lessons as a way of developing communication skills for secondary-aged pupils. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn about sensations by exploring different textures. Students in the sixth form cooked their own lunch, having purchased the ingredients the previous day. Such carefully planned activities enable pupils to develop their learning in a range of subjects.

Teachers assess the best way to help those pupils who are able to learn to read to become confident readers. Staff support those pupils who are learning to read to develop their knowledge of sounds and letters and to gain fluency in reading.

Leaders work in close partnership with parents and carers and pupils. Parents of children in early years say that they feel listened to. As pupils move through the school, they gain the confidence to share their views.

Members of staff are well trained in supporting pupils to improve their behaviour. They use this training successfully to minimise any disruption to learning. This helps pupils to learn without interruption.

Leaders plan a range of ways for pupils to develop personally. Pupils participate in music clubs, choirs and sports activities. Pupils said that they enjoy going walking in the mountains. They can explain how to prepare safely for these excursions. Pupils visit local cultural centres and libraries. They take part in regional sporting events. Such activities help pupils to develop confidence and a knowledge of the wider world.

Leaders and governors strive to ensure that pupils achieve as much as possible. Governors are knowledgeable and committed to helping pupils to achieve well. Teachers said that leaders are approachable and supportive, and think carefully about staff workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are robust systems for identifying those pupils who may be at risk of harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation. Members of staff benefit from regular and appropriate safeguarding training.

Systems for reporting concerns are robust. Staff know what they must do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare.

Pupils in the school are able to explain how to stay safe. They know how to report any online risks that they might encounter.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are times when some teachers do not design learning that is linked well to the long-term aims of subject curriculums. This means that some aspects of pupils' learning are not well sequenced. Leaders should ensure that teachers are supported effectively to design learning so that pupils build on their prior knowledge in logical steps. This will support pupils to achieve the aims outlined in subject curriculums and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of subjects over time.
- Occasionally, some teachers do not use assessment information well to inform pupils' next steps in learning. This means that some new learning does not build on pupils' secure existing knowledge. Leaders must ensure that teachers use assessment information effectively to determine which earlier learning to revisit and prioritise, and what content pupils should learn next.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2016.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	111494
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10211016
Type of school	All-through special school
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	115
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Henderson
Headteacher	Judith McGuinness
Website	www.deebanksschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 to 16 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is an all-age special school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder.
- School leaders do not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and communication, mathematics and physical education. This included discussions with leaders and teachers, visiting

lessons, reviewing a range of documentation, exploring evidence of pupils' work and talking to staff.

- Inspectors conducted case studies into seven pupils. This included reviewing documentation related to these pupils' learning.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with pupils, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the family support worker and teachers.
- The lead inspector met with parents, governors and external school partners.
- Inspectors saw pupils on their entry into school, their lunch break and during play time.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. This included examining the record of employment checks on school staff.
- The lead inspector took account of responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the pupil survey and staff survey.

Inspection team

Martin Hanbury, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Michelle Beard

Ofsted Inspector

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