

Dryden School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131200
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	331428
Inspection date	10 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Mel Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	31
Sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Holliday
Headteacher	Mrs Becky Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2006
School address	Shotley Gardens Low Fell Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE9 5UR
Telephone number	0191 4203811
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Almost half of the pupils are in the school's post-16 provision. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds across the Metropolitan Borough of Gateshead. Most pupils are White British with a very small number from other ethnic groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Dryden School provides an outstanding education for its learners. It has improved on its performance since the previous inspection in several key areas. The school's leadership and staff have improved the quality of teaching and the curriculum, helped by consistent monitoring and have developed provision to the point where it helps pupils to make outstanding progress in their personal skills. This underpins their excellent attitudes to learning and helps them to achieve their full potential. All the pupils do well in their studies and some make outstanding progress. The students in post-16 provision make excellent progress in developing a wide range of skills that will be of great benefit to them in later life.

The quality of teaching has consistently improved since the previous inspection and is outstanding throughout the school. Teachers plan their lessons very well, teamwork is excellent and pupils receive very good support from well-trained classroom assistants. As a result, they enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. Although teachers carefully monitor and pass comment on the pupils' work at regular intervals, they do not always systematically record all the small gains by which pupils make progress, then adjust targets accordingly.

The curriculum is outstanding because teachers tailor activities so perceptively to individual pupils' interests and abilities. As a result, learners tackle challenging activities with enthusiasm. These activities range from experiences at a sensory level to specific courses leading to nationally accredited qualifications. Teachers make excellent use of signs and symbols to provide visual clues for pupils who find difficulty in reading or with speech and language difficulties. Provision to teach the older students about the world of work and possibilities for further education and training, is excellent and consistently results in all the leavers going on to further education, training or social care. There are widespread opportunities for pupils to gain national accreditation, including the Duke of Edinburgh's award. There are very productive links with other schools, especially with a local specialist Arts College. This link has helped the school to secure the Artsmark silver award for its work.

Pupils thrive within the caring ethos of the school. The quality of the school's support and encouragement for all learners is exemplary. As a result, all make excellent progress in their personal development. Pupils feel very well supported and become confident learners. Teachers place a strong, entirely appropriate, emphasis on personal, health and social education (PHSE) and this encourages the pupils to respect and value themselves and others. They learn to remain healthy and to keep themselves safe. They value their school very much and this is reflected in the excellent relationships they have with staff and their very good attendance. Parents express huge confidence in their children's enjoyment of school and say that it has very high expectations. As one parent commented, 'she loves coming to Dryden and she has come on in leaps and bounds'.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Her substantial expertise and experience, complemented extremely well by the skills of the deputy headteacher, have driven continuing improvement. The school evaluates its work extremely well. It seeks and acts on the views of all connected with the school. The governing body is supportive and monitors the school's work effectively and robustly. There is an outstanding capacity to consolidate and improve further because of the school's rigorous self-evaluation and the determination of the governors and staff to provide the best possible service for the learners. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress in their personal development because of the huge range of excellent programmes which help them to gain the necessary self-confidence and independence to make their own choices and to prepare for adult life. Teachers encourage and enable students to practise and improve their basic skills within a wide range of practical situations. This is especially successful within the catering course which students enthusiastically opt into and which provides them with an excellent mix of vocational, personal and life skills. Students, for instance, at one point, created a 'restaurant' where they cooked for, served and welcomed guests. This was extremely successful. Challenging activities such as these give a great boost to the students' self-confidence and motivate them to give of their best. Lessons are underpinned by excellent teaching and this results in many students making outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy, in their social skills, and in their grasp of work-related learning. Students are helped to achieve their full potential through gaining 'Unit Awards' for each aspect of their work. The school has well developed plans to extend the range of courses to better reflect the wide range of ability of students. There are very good courses to prepare students for life after school, including very productive links with colleges. As a result of their growth in confidence and the excellent progress they have made in personal development almost all the students stay in education after they leave. The leadership and management of the post-16 provision are outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that each small step in pupils' achievement is recorded and used to set clear short term targets to help them to make even quicker progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils achieve well and some make outstanding progress. Because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities their attainment remains far below that expected of mainstream pupils. The progress of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is very good because every tiny step of their progress is observed and recorded and the next step in learning planned to build on this achievement. For more able pupils progress is occasionally slower because teachers do not always follow this excellent example. Progress is carefully monitored and analysed and there is no evidence of underachievement by any group of pupils or individuals. Pupils make good progress in learning the basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy. Year 11 pupils gain nationally recognised qualifications and in addition, 12 pupils this year gained the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award. All pupils make excellent progress in meeting their challenging targets in personal development. This has a significant impact on their achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' exceptional progress in personal development is their most significant and important achievement at school, and the one that parents hold most dear. It is a result of the school's strong, successful emphasis on each aspect of the pupils' physical, emotional and social development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many and varied opportunities to share in spiritual experiences, such as in the regular

celebration of religious festivals. The pupils gain a very good understanding of social and moral values through discussion, celebration assemblies and widespread opportunities to take part in the full, invigorating range of school activities. The school council is very effective. Members take their responsibilities very seriously and represent the pupil population extremely well. In this way all pupils have a strong voice in contributing to the life of the school. Pupils' cultural and multicultural understanding is outstanding. It is strongly supported by experiences which include aid efforts for third world countries and close links with a Ugandan school for whom they raise money. As a result, their understanding of community cohesion and diversity is excellent. Pupils develop a strong awareness of the importance of cultivating healthy lifestyles by eating and drinking sensibly and taking as much exercise as they can. Pupils feel safe and confident and know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. They also learn how to stay safe in the community, where they may find themselves more vulnerable. Behaviour is excellent, helped by pupils learning to take responsibility for their actions. Pupils feel free from bullying or unpleasantness and they really look forward to coming to school. This is confirmed by their happy smiles, by the care they give to all their friends and by their very good attendance. Their good progress in basic skills and excellent progress in work-related learning prepares them very well for when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers manage large classroom teams extremely well. These staff teams develop excellent, supportive relationships with pupils. These relationships play a hugely important part in promoting pupils' personal development and ensuring that pupils are safe and comfortable, allowing them to concentrate hard on their learning. Staff give very high levels of individual tuition. This ensures the pupils enjoy their lessons, try their best and they feel confident to sample new experiences. Pupils understand and respond well to the clear routines. Teachers are skilled in implementing specific programmes, for instance by using symbols and interactive whiteboards to help individual pupils develop their communication skills. The quality of lesson planning is very good. Teachers skilfully adapt national strategies in literacy and numeracy to add pace and rigour to their teaching. Staff are very perceptive. They are quick to recognise when a pupil may be facing difficulty or discomfort and respond rapidly. In this way, they are able to concentrate on managing pupils' learning rather than any resultant behaviour. Teachers and support staff regularly assess and monitor students' work. This is seen to best effect in the teaching and support of pupils with the most profound and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, slightly less so with other pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy a perceptively constructed curriculum, which is exceptionally well adapted to their individual needs. The excellent levels of support for those with additional difficulties ensure that all pupils have equal access to learning opportunities. The very strong emphasis on the development of pupils' personal skills has a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Programmes to develop pupils' communication and their basic literacy and numeracy skills are extremely effective in promoting their confidence and access to learning opportunities in other subjects. The school enjoys excellent relationships with a number of other schools and is involved in several partnerships. This helps to bring enrichment to the curriculum and has resulted, for

instance, in the school gaining the silver Artsmark. The school has excellent provision for work-related learning. A wide range of exciting activities take pupils out of the classroom, showing them that new things can be learned in many different situations. This adds substantially to the pupils' social skills, their self-confidence and their interest in learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There is excellent care and support for the pupils. Safeguarding, care and protection procedures fully meet government requirements and pupils see adults as their friends who they can always rely on and with whom they can share their successes or worries. The school has developed very strong procedures to collect and act on relevant information from a range of agencies. Partnerships with parents are exceptional. This is confirmed by the many positive comments made on questionnaires, such as 'The staff are always there if you need them or have a problem.' Very good transition planning supports pupils as they reach the end of their school career. Pupils gain a good understanding of when they have done well in their work and in their personal development and are given excellent support and guidance to help them to do their best.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher has shown outstanding leadership through her determination to achieve the highest possible outcomes for pupils. A strong senior team supports her. One of the school's strengths is in the rigorous and effective way managers monitor, evaluate and improve on every aspect of the school's performance. Senior staff are aware, for instance of the occasional inconsistencies in assessment and target setting and have planned for improvements. Procedures for monitoring pupils' performance are very well developed and effective. Leaders are thus able to ensure that all pupils have equal access to learning opportunities. There is excellent management and consistent planning to ensure pupils have a very clear knowledge and understanding of community cohesion. Communication within the school is excellent. There are very good procedures to support new staff, to monitor the performance of teachers and support staff and to ensure that all staff take full advantage of professional training. Governors provide outstanding support to the school. They work closely with individual staff and they rigorously monitor the school's strengths and areas for development. The school makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' awareness of the community they live in and how it varies from other communities, both nationally and globally. Through their outstanding personal development, pupils learn the importance of being good citizens and how they can make their own contribution to making the world a better place.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	1

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dryden School, Gateshead, NE9 5UR

Not long ago I came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in your classrooms, at lunchtime and especially at the school council. I could see that you all enjoy school very much. I was only with you for one day. That was long enough for me to realise that you go to a super school. I liked many things. Here are a few:

- you work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in your personal development
- the many different people at the school look after you very well
- you do a lot of really interesting activities including those that help you become independent, make choices and learn all about different places and customs
- all the adults work really hard to give you as much help as possible
- your headteacher runs the school very well and everyone, including your parents, gives her really strong support.

I think there could be one improvement:

- all the little bits of progress you make in your work should be written down in the same way. This information should be used to help you with the next stages of your work, so you will know what to do to improve more quickly.

You can help too, just by working as hard as you have been doing!

Please thank your parents for all the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes to you.

Yours faithfully

Mel Blackband

Lead inspector