Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Danecourt School

Hotel Road, Gillingham, Kent ME8 6AA

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 November 2024

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Cathryn Falconer. This school is part of the Maritime Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Nick Osborne, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tiffany Beck.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love their 'friendly' school. When asked, some found it difficult to find even one small thing that could be better. They happily agree that they enjoy learning, though disagree about which subjects they like the best. Despite their occasional differences in opinion, pupils behave very well and display a collective pride in their school. They feel safe here. They are inquisitive of visitors and keen to share their collective successes, be that as writers or as footballers.

Expectations of what pupils can achieve are very high here. Despite the many barriers pupils at this school face, their personal and academic achievements are impressive. This is because staff understand their complex needs and provide extremely personalised opportunities for them to learn and to thrive. A key aspect supporting pupils' success is the school's impressive integrated therapy provision, which is multi-faceted and delivered mostly in classrooms.

Inspectors' visits to all three sites show a commonality in the strengths of the school. Children in early years are as equally well supported as older pupils, who are well prepared for transition to secondary education. One pupil described his school as 'awesome'. Evidence gathered during the inspection would indicate that this is mostly the case.

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

This is a school moving forward at pace. Leaders at all levels have great energy and display a deep passion for getting things right for pupils. When elements of what the school provides need refining, staff are not afraid to reflect and make the changes needed. This is true in all aspects of the school's work. The result of this is sustained improvement in all areas since the school was last inspected.

The curriculum is developing over time, not least because pupil cohorts are evolving and growing. The school has an effective reading strategy to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. A highly effective mathematics curriculum is also in place. Staff use a wide range of resources to help pupils develop their mathematical skills, often through work linked to real life.

The curriculum's three 'tracks' (pathways) have recently been expanded to four to ensure that the needs of all pupils are securely met. Though pupils study in small classes, their individual learning is still designed in a bespoke way. This includes in Reception where staff are highly ambitious for all children, despite their complex needs. This means that pupils' progress through the curriculum, though often measured in small steps, is strong.

Teachers are very aware of the complex needs of each pupil. Teaching assistants impact positively on pupils' learning, including in the school's excellent early years provision. Good practice is shared across all sites and phases of the school. Members of the school's therapy team are also highly successful in leading aspects of teaching in classrooms. This approach is clearly not only benefiting pupils, but also developing the expertise of all staff. The impact of this work is reflected in the high quality of education the school is now providing for all pupils.

A great degree of importance is given to pupils' personal, social and emotional development. Tailored to individuals' needs, opportunities to develop pupils' independence, resilience and self-esteem are evident in all elements of the school day. Work to ensure that pupils enjoy and attend school regularly is also very effective. Absence, including persistent absence, has reduced significantly over time.

Pupils love their enrichment sessions. Trips out of school are purposeful, often aimed at building confidence and developing life skills. Aspects such as relationships and sex education and developing understanding of different cultures and ways of life are focused on the need of the child. Much of this work is underpinned by the school's personal, social and health education programme. Much more is delivered through a wide range of ongoing communal activities, developing pupils' character and providing rich experiences for all, no matter what their background.

Pupils' behaviour is generally excellent, though not always perfect. Staff work hard to cater for the complex needs of pupils. Incidents of high anxiety are dealt with well

because relationships are strong and staff are skilled at de-escalating tensions before problems arise.

Central to the school's sustained improvement is the oversight and support of the multi-academy trust in partnership with the local academy committee. Governance is strong. Staff workload and the well-being of all who work at the school have a high priority. Additionally, the school is outward looking. It has formed strong partnerships with other settings, benefiting pupils and staff alike. Staff experience focused and effective professional development. High-quality outreach work to other schools is ongoing and highly valued by other professionals.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness on 5 and 6 June 2019.

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.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	142266
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10341791
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	257
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tiffany Beck
CEO of the trust	Nick Osborne
Headteacher	Cathryn Falconer
Website	www.danecourtschool.com
Date(s) of previous inspection	5 and 6 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Maritime Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust with 12 other provisions.
- This school caters for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, including autism spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties, and speech, language and communication needs.
- Since the last inspection, the school has expanded and has introduced satellite provisions situated at Bligh Primary School, ME2 2UX, and Featherby Primary School, ME9 6PD.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with leaders at all levels, as well as teaching and support staff. The lead inspector met with the chair and one other member of the local academy committee. He also met with the CEO and a member of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons across all three sites of the school, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of parents, leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met and talked to pupils throughout the inspection to gain their views about their school. The lead inspector also met formally with two representative groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents and carers submitted through Ofsted Parent View. The views of staff were considered through Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Elaine Parkinson	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Fisher-Pink	Ofsted Inspector

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