

The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106656
Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	377442
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2012
Lead inspector	Bernard Campbell HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,054
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John McDougall
Headteacher	Neil Clark
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Thirty nine lessons were observed and 38 teachers seen. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Governing Body Strategy Group, and a consultant headteacher representing the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised the school's plans, records, analysis of data and self-evaluation. Inspectors took account of 46 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 13 staff questionnaires and 150 pupil questionnaires. No responses were available from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).

Information about the school

The school moved in to a new building in January 2011 and changed its name from The Dearne High to The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre. The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre is a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average. A higher than average proportion of students is supported at school action. One in six students is supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, which is high. The school does not meet the current floor standard.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students’ low attainment, and the underachievement of lower-ability students, especially boys; those known to be eligible for free school meals; and, students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Achievement is inadequate. Over the last three years, the proportion of students gaining five GCSEs including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C, has risen more slowly than nationally and remains low. The gap between the school and national measures of overall attainment, for eight GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to G, has widened and some groups underachieved.
- In GCSE mathematics in 2011, students’ attainment was low and their progress was inadequate. However, over the last two years, due to improved teaching, the quality of learning in mathematics has improved significantly throughout the school. The current Year 11 is on track for improved progress and attainment in 2012. Over the last three years, achievement in English has improved steadily.
- Teaching is satisfactory rather than good because over time it has not been strong enough to ensure that all pupils make consistently good gains in their learning. Inspectors saw examples of good and outstanding teaching, although some teaching has weaker features.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. The school is calm and orderly, students move about safely, and are punctual to lessons. Students are courteous and cooperative and generally respond promptly to teachers’ directions. There is occasional low-level disruption in lessons with weaker teaching.

- The Principal provides strong and effective leadership and a clear vision for improvement. The leadership and management of teaching have successfully brought about secure improvement in English and learning has improved in mathematics, with strong evidence of improved attainment in 2012. Teaching has improved as a result of effective management of performance which led to a significant reduction in inadequate teaching. Leaders' higher demands for quicker improvement by satisfactory teachers, and more rigorous accountability and action to tackle underachievement, have accelerated the pace of improvement. These actions demonstrate a satisfactory capacity to bring about more rapid and sustained improvement. However, the school has rightly recognised the need to further strengthen the senior leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement and exceed the current floor standard in 2012 by:
 - increasing achievement in mathematics and closing the gap with English
 - improving the progress made by lower-ability students, students known to be eligible for free school meals, and students supported by school action plus or with statements of special educational needs towards gaining eight GCSE or equivalent qualifications
 - improving students' skills in literacy, extended writing and their spoken contributions to learning.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - improving the match of teaching to the range of student needs in the class
 - refining the use of questioning to challenge thinking and stimulate students' personal response
 - increasing opportunities for students to work independently
 - extending the use of peer and self-assessment as means for students to reflect on and improve their learning
 - improving the consistency of marking to highlight what students have achieved and how they can improve.
- Further strengthen the senior leadership team.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment on entry to the school is low. Although there has been an improvement in GCSE results, attainment remains low and the gap with national results has widened. Students at all levels of ability make the expected progress in gaining five GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. However, progress in gaining eight GCSEs at grades A*-G, including English and mathematics, is inadequate and several groups have underachieved: lower-ability students, especially boys; those known to be eligible for free school meals; and students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. A number of students who underachieved belonged to several of these groups. The inadequate provision of an

off-site vocational course contributed to poor achievement by these groups and this has since stopped. Variation in the quality of teaching in a few subjects also contributed to underachievement, especially in technology and history. Effective steps have been implemented to tackle these weaknesses. In a few cases, personal circumstances, or a special need, meant that students were appropriately placed on personalised programmes that resulted in fewer or lower-level qualifications. Most parents and carers said that their children are making good progress and that their needs are met. The inspection evidence, however, shows that several groups of students have not achieved as much as they should.

Students are pleased with and proud of their new learning environment. They are cooperative and willing to learn. In the best learning, students discuss and solve problems and explain things to each other. They develop their understanding of concepts and their use of subject terminology. They make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to do research. In one lesson observed, students with special educational needs were excited by the challenge presented by the teacher and they worked hard to overcome obstacles and devise solutions to problems. In some lessons students lack opportunities or confidence to make a personal response, meet a challenge and develop their thinking. Students occasionally find that work is too hard or too easy. In some cases they do not make enough use of extended writing or discussion to extend and consolidate their learning. On occasion, a task is not broken down into small enough steps for students with special educational needs to follow.

Quality of teaching

Most students and parents say that teaching is good. The inspection judged that this is true of the majority of teaching currently. However, over time teaching has not promoted consistently good learning and some current practice has weaknesses. In good or better teaching, high expectations are focused on clear learning objectives which are referred to during the lesson. A wide variety of well planned and challenging activities, conducted at an appropriate pace, maintains the students' interest and motivation. Effective questioning challenges the students to draw on their previous learning, to justify their answers and explain their reasoning. In one outstanding lesson, students were encouraged to explore whether a photographer should show real but shocking pictures, or whether the public should be protected from these images. Students responded enthusiastically with thoughtful answers, showing deep reflection and empathy.

The teaching of additional small group sessions is effective because it is well-targeted to specific student needs in a range of subjects and year groups. Whilst these sessions are increasingly popular, a few students who would most benefit choose not to attend.

In satisfactory teaching, planning does not take enough account of students' differing needs and all students work through the same tasks, irrespective of ability. On occasion, this limits the progress of higher-ability students. In some lessons, the focus is on completing the task rather than on what is to be learnt. Students are kept busy, but opportunities are missed for students to develop their own ideas or to reflect on their own learning. Some teachers talk too much, question too little, and

do not give students sufficient opportunity to improve their learning through discussion and reflection. Opportunities to allow students to reflect on spiritual or moral issues are sometimes missed, even when the topic invites it. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson on the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, the teacher missed an opportunity to allow students to reflect on the changing attitudes to race and racism. A small minority of teaching does not take sufficient account of students' differing needs and some questioning does not challenge well enough or draw out a response.

Marking is regular but is inconsistent in the quality with which it comments on what students have achieved and what skills they should improve. In some subjects, good peer- and self-assessment enables students to understand how well they are doing and motivates them to achieve new skills. This practice is not sufficiently widespread across all subjects.

The school is in the early stages of introducing common expectations for extended writing in the teaching of different curriculum subjects, supported by a well-planned training programme. It has also begun to develop programmes to promote regular reading and to accelerate the progress of those with the lowest levels of literacy at Key Stage 3. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these developments on students' achievement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are generally positive about the standards of behaviour in lessons and around the school. This matched the views of inspectors. The few parents that responded to the inspection questionnaire were less positive. The Principal and senior leaders are highly visible to students, foster good relationships and they have established higher standards of behaviour in the new environment. Students say that behaviour has improved, especially with the move to the new school. They respect the well-looked-after new school building. Students are polite and courteous and value their good relationships with staff. They respond promptly to teachers' direction and work cooperatively. Over the last year, there has been a reduction in the frequency of reported incidents of disruption in classrooms. Some students with challenging personal circumstances or with emotional, behavioural or social difficulties receive effective support from staff and external agencies. This helps them to remain in school and improve their behaviour and well-being. Students are confident that occasional instances of bullying are dealt with promptly. Students say they are safe in school and parents and carers share this confidence. Students receive good guidance on internet safety and cyber-bullying. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average and is monitored closely.

Leadership and management

The leaders have successfully established the school in the new building, with a new identity and high aspirations. However, for a time, dealing with this major change took up a significant amount of leadership time and, together with the lack of a deputy to the Principal, the pace of school improvement was temporarily reduced. Better quality and stable staffing in mathematics has led to improved learning. Effective leadership at senior and subject level has brought about sustained improvement in English and has improved the learning in mathematics. The

introductions of a standard lesson plan and a helpful guide to lesson planning have led to greater consistency in teaching. These also help teachers to manage the longer time allocation given to lessons in the new school building. The proportion of satisfactory or weaker teaching has been reduced in the last term as a result of a more concerted approach to observing lessons. Termly unannounced visits are followed up with a well-planned short-term programme of support. This new, more robust structure is already having an impact in improving the practice of individual teachers. Leaders accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning.

Effective action has been taken to tackle weaknesses in senior and middle leadership, though some new leaders are still developing their leadership skills. A lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluation led to inaccuracy in predicted results in 2011. As a result, the use of data and the accountability of middle leaders have been strengthened by more frequent and rigorous tracking of progress, a stronger focus on identifying underachievement and tackling inequality and clearer actions to support individual students.

Expectations have been raised and students appreciate that they are being pushed to achieve more. Ambitious targets and more regular assessment provide students and parents with a stronger flow of information about their progress which helps students to stay on track. The culture of the school has made a positive shift though it has some way to go. A few students are not sufficiently engaged and do not take enough responsibility for their own learning. The school is aware of a few weaknesses in the effectiveness with which it engages parents and carers in the life of the school. For example, the school currently lacks a website and few parents or carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. However, the school successfully reached a high proportion of parents and carers in the recent discussion of Year 9 options, and parents and carers have responded positively to the more frequent information provided about their children's progress, and the termly newsletter.

The curriculum provides an appropriate range of pathways for students at Key Stage 4 that are flexible in meeting students' needs and in promoting progression to the next stage of education, training and employment. Leaders have acted effectively to tackle weaknesses in vocational provision that contributed to low achievement. The range of vocational provision has been extended and further developments are planned. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within school and the community. The extra-curricular programme is satisfactory in the context of the timing of the school day; however, there is a limited range of times when students can engage in sporting or enrichment activities. A wide ranging programme of intervention takes advantage of the beginning and end of the school day to provide increasingly effective study support for students across subjects and year groups. Safeguarding meets requirements with appropriate policies and procedures. Training is in place and provision for safeguarding is well monitored.

The membership of the governing body has been strengthened over the last year. Governors have introduced a more focused and businesslike approach to supporting and challenging school leaders which is about to be implemented. They have begun to articulate a vision and a strategy for raising achievement and for linking the

development of the school to the wider community. The improvements made, and the more rigorous leadership, demonstrate a satisfactory capacity to tackle the remaining weaknesses and to bring about more rapid and sustained improvement.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre, Rotherham, S63 9EW

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. Although the school has positive strengths, we judged that it does not provide an adequate education and it needs a notice to improve.

These were some of the main things we found in our inspection:

- Attainment at GCSE has not improved fast enough.
- Achievement is inadequate because generally lower-ability students, those known to be eligible for free school meals and some students with special educational needs do not make enough progress.
- In English your achievement has improved and better teaching has started to improve your achievement in mathematics.
- In your questionnaires most of you said teaching is good and you learn a lot. In our view teaching over time is no better than satisfactory because it has not helped enough of you to achieve satisfactorily. On the inspection we saw some improvements, and would like even more teaching to be good or better.
- In your comments most of you said that behaviour is satisfactory in lessons but there are occasions when a few misbehave. You said that you feel safe and that any bullying is handled well. You said that things have improved since you moved into your wonderful new school building and that staff support you well.

To help the school to improve, we have said that senior leaders should:

- raise attainment by closing the gap in achievement between mathematics and English and meet the current floor standard in 2012
- improve the progress of specific groups of students who have underachieved in the past
- improve students' skills in literacy, extended writing and in making spoken contributions to learning
- increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching
- further strengthen the capacity of the senior leadership team.

I hope you continue to do your best, especially in mathematics, and that you all work hard to achieve your potential.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector

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