

Duchess's Community High School

Howling Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1DH

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students in all year groups make good progress and achieve well. GCSE, AS and A level results all compare favourably with national figures.
- A good atmosphere for learning pervades the school.
- The school provides an effective reading recovery programme for the students who are behind when they join in Year 9.
- Students benefit from good quality teaching. Their teachers have high expectations of them and plan interesting and varied lessons that enable them to make good progress.
- Students enjoy school and recognise that it provides them with a good quality of education. They are keen to do well and display good attitudes to learning. Attendance is above average and behaviour is good.
- A very wide variety of examination and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, ensures that students have an excellent choice of options.
- Senior leadership is effective. Together with his senior team and middle managers the headteacher ensures that the school consistently provides its students with a good quality of education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some lessons, teachers do not fully cater for the full range of students' abilities. This means that some students are not fully challenged while others tend to struggle with their work.
- Although there is some outstanding teaching, the proportion is not large enough to lift students' achievement from good to outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- During this inspection, inspectors observed 39 lessons, including four joint observations with senior staff.
- They held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, senior staff, middle managers and groups of students.
- They scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including governing body minutes, school self-evaluation, development plan, analyses of students' attainment and progress and safeguarding procedures.
- They took account of 91 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Paddick, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Mark Patton	Additional Inspector
Michael Wardle	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Duchess's Community High School is larger than average for a secondary school and has a large sixth form.
- It is a specialist Technology College, which provides education for its students on two sites close to the centre of Alnwick.
- It is federated with two local middle schools and a first school and is currently in the process of applying for academy status.
- Almost all students are White British.
- The proportions of pupils supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - reducing the small amount of teaching that requires improvement
 - using the existing outstanding classroom practice in the school as a model of excellence
 - improving the planning of some lessons so that they cater well for pupils of all abilities and incorporate suitable approaches to keep potentially restless boys fully engaged.
- Produce development plans designed to improve the school's overall effectiveness from good to outstanding by:
 - setting quantitative and really challenging targets for the quality of teaching and students' achievement
 - monitoring these targets rigorously and frequently
 - sharing the plans and results of the monitoring and review procedures with all stakeholders.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students in all year groups make good progress and achieve well. They join in Year 9 with broadly average attainment and proceed to gain above average GCSE results. There is a similar picture in the sixth form, where students' qualifications on entry to AS and A-level courses are broadly average and outcomes compare very favourably with national figures.
- Students achieve well in English, mathematics and science as they move from Year 9 to Year 11. GCSE results clearly show that attainment in these subjects rises to above average over three years. The proportion of students gaining at least five GCSE results at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was above average in 2011. Results for 2012 show a similar picture. These results indicate that students' progress rates compare very favourably with national expectations.
- In Year 13 in 2011, broadly average A-level results represented good achievement for an intake with below average qualifications for starting out on A-level courses. In 2012, results from a more able cohort were above average overall and the proportion of A and B grades rose substantially.
- Students achieve well over time because they generally benefit from teaching that is at least good. Evidence from lessons and a scrutiny of students' books confirms that students consistently make good progress over time in a wide range of subjects. They use technology naturally and confidently as the need arises.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs also make good progress, often in relation to their personal development. They frequently gain very creditable examination results.
- When students join the school with below average attainment in reading, an effective programme of individual and small-group lessons enables them to improve their skills and better access texts in the subjects that they are studying.
- When managers become aware that any particular group of pupils is not making at least good progress, they investigate the reasons and put extra resources in place. The success of these actions is reflected in the current rapid closing of the gap in performance at GCSE between students supported by the pupil premium and other students.
- Students are very well prepared for education, training or employment beyond Years 11, 12 and 13. Good GCSE results mean that they can choose from a wide range of AS and A level courses while good sixth form results, coupled with a strong study ethic, means that they are well prepared for the rigours of the degree courses that they choose.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The school has maintained good quality teaching since the previous inspection. This is clear because students have continued to achieve good examination results.
- The school's own observations indicate that the large majority of teaching is at least good, a small amount requires improvement, and some is outstanding. This closely matches the overall range in the quality of teaching observed during the inspection. Evidence from the joint observations shows that there is a close match between the senior managers' perception of high quality and that of the inspection team.
- Teachers demonstrate fully the qualities outlined in the national Teaching Standards. They use their subject expertise well to plan lessons that provide students with an interesting and varied experience in the classroom. They quickly build good relationships with students and usually manage to promote a very productive learning atmosphere. Lessons generally proceed with a brisk pace so students learn quickly and make good progress.
- Where teaching is of the highest quality, lessons proceed at a rapid pace and students make huge gains in knowledge and understanding. This is because teachers plan with intricate care

so that learning is logically sequenced yet crosses new boundaries. In these lessons, teachers plan exceptionally well for all the different ability groups in the lesson, make learning fun, and operate with a perfect balance between their own input and student activities.

- In the small number of lessons which require improvement, the teacher often plans for all of the students to do exactly the same work. This results in some students not being challenged and others struggling to keep up. In a few lessons, class management techniques are not fully successful in fully engaging groups of boys.
- Parents believe that teaching is good and this positive view is endorsed by students who spoke to inspectors.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is good

- Students display positive attitudes to their education and they are keen to do well.
- Attitudes in lessons are usually very positive. In most of the observed lessons, students cooperated very well with their teachers. Relationships were very productive and a strong work ethic prevailed. However, very occasionally, a few students in Years 9 to 11 became rather restless and inattentive.
- It is to students' great credit that they cooperate very well moving between sites so that time lost from lessons is minimised as far as possible.
- Evidence strongly suggests that students' behaviour observed during the inspection is typical of the daily operation of the school. Most students, staff, and parents who responded via Parent View, say that behaviour is generally good and that there are few instances of poor conduct.
- When students' behaviour or attitudes fall below the school's high expectations, members of staff are generally effective in putting measures into place to improve them. Exclusions for poor conduct are low and falling.
- A range of internal systems support students' welfare and learning effectively. For example, if they are not making enough progress, the school puts measures into place to overcome the difficulties that they are having.
- Students say that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They are confident that members of staff would deal with any bullying effectively. They understand about potential risks presented by alcohol, drugs and the internet.
- Attendance is above average and improving because there are effective monitoring systems in place and, where necessary, productive links with outside professionals and agencies.

The leadership and management is good

- Good leadership and management have underpinned the good quality of education that the school has provided over several years even though managers have had to contend with difficulties posed by split site accommodation that is inadequate for its purpose. This consistent good quality of education has resulted in students of all ages making good progress over a wide range of subjects and clearly demonstrates that the school has excellent capacity for further development.
- Senior and middle managers successfully promote a real sense of purpose amongst members of staff and students. They communicate a shared strategic vision for the school and produce plans which are appropriately focused on providing well for the students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Managers and members of the governing body have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and know very quickly if it is not meeting its challenging targets, particularly in relation to the progress of groups of pupils.
- School development planning is appropriately linked to intended areas of development. However, it lacks a really challenging series of quantitative targets for the quality of teaching, achievement and attendance designed to underpin a strong move from good quality education to excellence.
- The management of teaching is good. Any underperformance is addressed quickly and

effectively. The school's performance management arrangements work well and they are complemented by productive systems for improving classroom techniques.

- Equality of opportunity for all to find success has a high profile. Leaders and managers monitor the progress of all groups of students carefully and accurately to ensure that they all do equally well. The success of these measures is reflected in recent improvements in GCSE results for middle ability students in mathematics.
- Managers have designed a very good curriculum which provides students with secure pathways towards a wide range of qualifications. It also promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through the provision of a wide range of extra activities which they really value.
- Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements.
- As the school is successful, the local authority provides light-touch support, for example, by giving a second opinion about self-evaluation. The federation with three other local schools is beginning to raise aspirations and set common targets for rates of progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The school communicates with parents well. Most feel that they are well informed about students' progress. The website is well designed, informative, helpful and easy to navigate.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- governors have a clear view of the school's strong features and provide effective challenge and support when necessary
- they have been effective in helping to draw the four schools together into a hard federation, which is beginning to have a positive impact, particularly on aspirations and transfer arrangements at the end of Year 8.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122362
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	403487

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	13-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1175
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	354
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Walker
Headteacher	Maurice Hall
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2007
Telephone number	01665 602166
Fax number	01665 510602
Email address	admin@dchs-alnwick.org

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