

Devon Studio School

Newton Road, Torquay, TQ2 7FT

Inspection dates

23–24 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement is not high enough, particularly in mathematics. The work they do does not always challenge them sufficiently.
- Students following AS and A2 courses in the sixth form underachieve. Students could reach higher standards in these courses.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of students' achievement, especially the most able. The academic targets set for these students are too low.
- Students' work varies in quality. They are not always expected to present their work neatly, including in mathematics. There is an inconsistent approach to improving students' spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Teaching does not take enough account of what students already know and can do. Students sometimes spend too long copying from books or from the board.
- Teachers do not check enough on how well and how much students understand during lessons. This means that students are not always moved on soon enough to more demanding work.
- Teachers' assessments of students' learning are not always reliable. Leaders do not have a fully accurate understanding of achievement, including in the sixth form.
- Information from other schools about students who join this school is often incomplete or slow to arrive. This makes it harder for school leaders to make sure that all students get off to a flying start.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors are demonstrating the capacity to improve the school. They have already shown they can make a difference to the school and its wider community. Leaders enjoy the full support of staff across the school.
- School staff have a deep commitment to helping students to succeed. Some students who had struggled to achieve at their previous schools are now doing much better and progressing well.
- Most students are developing into confident young adults. Their social and moral development is especially strong.
- There is a successful focus on the social and emotional needs of students, and on building their resilience and skills for life and learning.
- The behaviour and safety of students are good. Leaders' actions to improve students' attitudes, conduct and attendance have had a notable impact.
- Many students are successfully developing the skills and experience they need to succeed in their future training, study or employment. Most students completing Year 11 and Year 13 this year are well-placed to move on successfully to their next stages.
- This is an improving school. Governors are making an effective contribution to sustaining this.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 16 lessons and visited two further lessons to talk to students about their experiences of school. In their visits to lessons, inspectors also looked carefully at the quality of students’ work and the accuracy of the school’s assessment information. In total, 14 lessons were observed jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- At the time of the inspection, only students from Years 10 and 12 were present in school.
- Discussions took place with the Principal, other leaders including the deputy principal and with various members of staff. Inspectors also spoke with students in a meeting with them, at social times and during lessons. The lead inspector also met with three members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors scrutinised records of the school’s self-evaluation, the checks on teaching quality, improvement planning, assessment information, and minutes of the governing body. Safeguarding documentation and records relating to students’ behaviour and attendance were also examined. An inspector also spoke with a manager from the local hospital to discuss students’ experiences during work placements.
- Inspectors looked at the 22 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The views of staff were obtained and 25 responded to a staff written questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lee Northern, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Peter Green	Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Devon Studio School is a school for students aged between 14 and 19 years and has a focus on vocational education in the areas of health and social care. It occupies a new building on a site in Torbay Hospital Trust grounds.
- Studio schools are typically much smaller than the average-sized secondary school, as is the case with this school. It opened and admitted its first students into Years 10 and 12 in September 2013.
- The school does not have leaders with specific responsibility for subject areas within its leadership structure. Instead, two recently appointed leaders take responsibility for the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. The school refers to teachers as 'learning coaches'. The school uses separate facilities for teaching physical education, as none are available on its own site.
- As part of its studio school provision, the school aims to provide placements and work experience for all students. It works with a range of partners in the local area to do this.
- The great majority of students are girls. Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, which is additional government funding to support the achievement of disadvantaged students including those in public care, is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students or those with special educational needs, including with a statement of educational needs, is below average.
- The school has two main strategic partners: South Devon College and Torbay and South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Responsibility for governance, however, lies with the school's governing body, although representatives from both partners sit on the governing body. The school purchases some administrative services from South Devon College through a service level agreement.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision provided by Devon Personalised Learning Service (DPLS), through education other than at school services run by the local authority (EOTAS) and at South Devon College Link service. Although most of these students attend full-time at these providers, they are dual-registered and are therefore also on the roll of the school.
- This year is the first year in which the school will have a full set of public examination results which, when published and validated, can be compared with the government's floor standards, the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress at the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and achievement, particularly for the most able students, by:
 - making sure that students have academic targets that are challenging enough
 - having the highest expectations of students' achievement, including how they present and complete their work, including homework
 - developing a more consistent approach across the school to improving students' reading, writing, spelling and grammar
 - improving teaching in mathematics, including through placing a greater emphasis on developing students' understanding
 - ensuring the reliability of assessment information and making sure teachers use this to help students make faster progress in lessons.
- Improve the sixth form by:
 - raising the quality of teaching for students following AS and A2 courses, and for those students resitting GCSE English or mathematics
 - strengthening the impact of study programmes by making sure that all students want to and do take part in worthwhile work placements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and governors have succeeded in ensuring the school provides a distinctive experience for students. It is increasingly successful in meeting the needs of students, employers and other partners.
- The Principal is relentless in her passion for improving the school. She has ensured a focus on the school's six core values of care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment. In this, she has the overwhelming support of staff.
- Leaders have succeeded in developing a community where staff at all levels are reflective about their own practice, willing to admit where it needs to be improved and welcoming of the challenge and support to help them develop. This is a learning organisation in the widest sense.
- The culture and ethos of the school is one in which everyone strives for the best they can be. There is a very strong focus on the social and emotional needs of students, and on building their resilience and skills for life. Many students, some of whom have had troubled school careers prior to joining the school, settle in happily and make better progress than in the past. However, the expectations of students' achievement, and of their involvement in all that the school offers including on placements and work experience, could be higher than it is at the moment.
- The curriculum provides a well-balanced mix of academic courses alongside vocational and work-based learning, supported by placements, for example, in hospitals or care settings. Although there is an emphasis on the health and caring professions, this does not limit students' choices when they leave the school. Students say they value the good range of impartial careers advice and guidance they receive which helps them keep an open mind to the opportunities available.
- The leadership of teaching is effective in helping teaching to improve and robust action is taken where teaching is not good enough. There is a systematic approach to checking the quality of teaching and leaders have a broad understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. However, the checks leaders make do not always make clear the impact of teaching on learning, or on the learning of specific groups of students, such as the most able. This means that leaders' evaluations of teaching are sometimes too generous.
- Safeguarding and child protection procedures are secure and meet statutory requirements, including for those students attending work placements or learning away from the school site. At the time of the inspection, procedures to ensure safe recruitment were appropriately robust. School leaders and governors acknowledge there is further work to do to deepen staff and students' understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders have had a notable impact on improving the behaviour and attendance of students at the school. There are many individual case studies showing the significant impact of the work of the school to support students with particular barriers to learning and achievement. The use of alternative provision is appropriately considered to ensure it meets the best interests of students. The Principal makes good use of partnerships across the authority to ensure this.
- The school is effective in promoting students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development, and for preparing them for life in modern Britain. The curriculum makes an appropriate contribution to this and leaders check carefully how well British values are promoted, including through tutorial sessions and assemblies. Students display a strong sense of moral values and social awareness including through opportunities to experience work in caring environments and in understanding the needs, for example, of vulnerable members of society. In an English lesson, Year 10 students carefully and maturely explored issues to do with equality and racial discrimination during their study of Othello.
- The school receives very little direct support from the local authority. It works in a number of different ways with other schools in the locality. For example, leaders work with staff at Torbay School in developing approaches to behaviour management and mediation.
- As a result of the progress made in developing the school since it opened in 2013, leaders have demonstrated good capacity to continue to improve the school. A recent widening of leadership roles to include leaders with responsibility for each Key Stage, has further strengthened this capacity. Although these leaders are relatively new to their roles, they are being well supported in developing their skills.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors provide good levels of scrutiny and challenge and are developing an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the school's performance. They played a key role in working with leaders to develop their own 'dashboard' of indicators of student outcomes. They bring a good level of expertise and experience and reflect well on their own practices and effectiveness. Sometimes their

probing of specific aspects, such as the impact of pupil premium funding on raising the attainment of disadvantaged students, is not sharply focused or forensic enough. Governors have ensured an appropriate staff appraisal system is in place to reward good teaching; they have a good understanding of this process and have challenged leaders over its effectiveness. Through their visits to the school, governors are also developing their understanding of the overall quality of teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. The ethos of the school makes a strong contribution to students' positive attitudes to school life. Although students show good attitudes to school and staff, they do not always approach lessons with levels of commitment and enthusiasm that pushes their learning forward. This is one of the reasons why behaviour is not yet outstanding.
- Staff work hard to understand the barriers to students' learning and development. For example, the work of personal coaches helps many students to build greater self-esteem, confidence and resilience. As a result, some students who have had difficult experiences in other schools are helped to re-engage successfully with education and school life.
- Students report that most lessons proceed smoothly and without interruption and that behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Inspection evidence shows that, although disruption to learning in lessons is rare, it still happens in a few lessons, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders have introduced a new system for tackling instances of poor behaviour around the school. As a result of greater consistency in the use of this approach, the overall number of behaviour referrals is declining quickly over time. This is also because leaders use information gathered about these referrals to provide extra support where this is needed.
- The number of students who have received a fixed-term exclusion from school is broadly in line with the national average and no students have been permanently excluded from the school since it first opened. In a few cases, students attend alternative provision that better meets their needs. This is helping them to improve their attendance, behaviour and engagement with education.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students spoken to feel that the school is a safe place, where they feel free from bullying and harassment. Those who spoke with inspectors did so with considerable maturity and openness, including discussing their understanding of issues to do with discrimination and prejudice.
- This level of understanding extends to the risks associated with the internet and social media. Through the curriculum and links with the community police officer, students develop a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe.
- Overall attendance is broadly average, including in the sixth form. As a result of a successful focus by leaders on improving attendance, there has been a good reduction in the number of students who are persistently absent from school. Staff work hard to understand and address the reasons why, for a few students, attendance sometimes begins to decline.
- Students in the sixth form are allowed to sign out of the school at breaks and lunchtime. Although the school café area is a pleasant and relaxing place which offers a range of menu options that students welcome, some sixth form students choose instead to access less healthy alternatives available locally.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because there is too much variation in quality across the school, including in the sixth form. Leaders believe the overall quality of teaching is better than it is. This is because their checks on teaching quality do not always take sufficient account of how well teaching promotes learning for all groups of students.
- The best teaching is founded on high-quality relationships and takes careful notice of the progress students are making. Teachers check how well students have understood the work and adjust the pace and challenge of learning accordingly.
- Staff are strongly committed to helping all students to achieve. Students receive some useful feedback

about the quality of their work, but not all feedback helps students to make faster progress. For example, in English, the written feedback provided does not always clarify how students should improve their work.

- Students respond well to teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiastic approach. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, the teacher engaged the students in a challenging lesson through his infectious enthusiasm. Despite some initial reticence, the students were keen to contribute and demonstrate what they had learned.
- However, weaker teaching does not have high enough expectations of students, particularly of the most able. Sometimes, too little attention is given to what students already know and can do. For example, in some lessons, too much time is spent copying out material from the board or from books. Teaching does not always check students' understanding carefully enough in order that learning can be reinforced or moved on more quickly.
- In mathematics, a legacy of weaker and temporary teaching has only recently been resolved. As a result, students are not currently reaching the standards required to achieve the highest grades at GCSE. Teaching is not fully effective in helping students to develop a good understanding of the mathematics they learn, including for lower-attaining students.
- Assessment information is not sufficiently accurate across the school, and leaders' understanding of students' achievement sometimes lacks rigour. The school cannot yet be fully confident that its assessment information is giving a reliable picture of students' achievement. Leaders have rightly recognised that making sure all assessments are sufficiently robust is a key area for improvement.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because students do not make consistently good progress across the school. For example, the standards reached by the most able students are not always high enough and students' achievement and rates of progress in mathematics are too low. In the sixth form, students following AS and A2 courses are not yet doing well enough.
- Although achievement varies across the school, it is often better in vocational subjects, including in health and social care. Students enjoy this subject because they feel that teaching helps them to achieve good grades in their assignments. In science, although the impact of recent improvements to teaching is beginning to be seen, there is more to do before achievement is consistently strong.
- A similar pattern of achievement is also evident for disadvantaged students. Through the quality of the personal support for disadvantaged students, the school is successful in improving their opportunities and aspirations. However, the school's assessment information shows that disadvantaged students are not making as much progress as other students and that their achievement gap is not closing quickly enough. This is because there is too little focus on targeting support more directly at raising the levels of attainment for disadvantaged students.
- The progress made by disabled students and those with special educational needs matches that of other students in the school. The help provided by learning support coaches (teaching assistants) does not always balance the need for direct support with that needed to help students to work without adult assistance.
- Sometimes, students do not achieve highly enough because their teachers' expectations are too low. This is particularly true for the most able. It is also true of the standards of presentation of some students' work. For example, in mathematics, too many students lay out their work poorly and draw untidy diagrams without a pencil or ruler. Across the school, there is not a consistent approach to how students should present their work or develop their skills in reading, writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some students have a poor approach to completing homework or assignment tasks. This also undermines the accuracy of some staff judgements of students' attainment.
- Students' attainment is tracked regularly, although not always accurately. The late receipt of often incomplete Key Stage 3 data from students' previous schools exacerbates this situation. As a result, the school's assessment scores do not always accurately reflect the potential of students when they join the school, particularly in mathematics. Inconsistencies in assessment practice mean that leaders cannot be fully confident of their predictions of students' achievement. This was seen, for example, in the weak results in the AS examinations for students completing Year 12 in 2014.
- All students have targets based on an assessment of their abilities on entry to the school. These targets are not always challenging enough for all students. In particular, very few of the most able students have targets for GCSE that are an A or an A*. One consequence of this is that some teaching does not help these students to develop the skills and understanding they need to reach the highest grades.
- The great majority of students in Years 11 and 13 are moving on successfully to further education, and to

employment or training. Many of these destinations are directly linked to the courses students have followed during their time at the school.

- The small number of students who attend alternative provision, mainly for behavioural reasons, are helped to improve their attendance and their engagement with learning. Most go on to show improvement in the progress they make.
- The school does not make use of early entry to public examinations.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- All students receive one-to-one advice and guidance on entry to the sixth form. However, this has not always ensured that students are on courses that maximise their success. Nevertheless, most students complete the courses they begin when they join the sixth form, although the retention of students on AS and A2 courses is not as high as for vocational programmes.
- Study programmes are generally well-planned and organised and the requirements are usually met. Most students are happy with the placements and work experience they receive. However, some do not take part in a work placement, particularly during Year 12. Although these students are sometimes reluctant to take part, more could be done to help them to access the opportunities provided. Leaders are also broadening the range of providers who offer work-based learning placements.
- Outcomes for students resitting GCSE mathematics or English in 2014 were mixed. For example, although many of the students retaking English made good progress and attained well, none of those students completing GCSE mathematics achieved a grade C pass or better. Although this reflects the impact of poor teaching in mathematics in the past, these weaknesses in the quality of mathematics teaching have only recently been tackled.
- Only a minority of students follow AS and A2 courses in the sixth form, as the small number of subjects on offer are intended to complement the vocational programmes also available. Nevertheless, many of the students on these courses underachieve, including the most able. For example, no student achieved an A*, A or B grade in the AS examinations in 2014, despite, in some cases, having achieved well in their GCSEs at their previous schools. In addition, teachers' assessment grades for students on AS and A2 courses are unreliable and so leaders cannot be fully confident of their predictions of students' performance.
- Most students on vocational courses do better than this, and many are on future pathways linked to their programme of study. The progress made by students on vocational courses is carefully checked and teaching generally meets their needs well. Some students make substantial strides and reach high standards, despite having done much less well at their previous school.
- Most students show good attitudes to their studies and make a positive contribution to the school. However, some express concerns with occasional instances of distracting behaviour in a small number of lessons, including in some vocational lessons. In the school's survey of students' views, one-third of students reported that they felt their lessons did not always challenge them sufficiently. Inspection evidence also supports the view that teaching in the sixth form is not always challenging enough.
- The school is developing its approach to raising awareness of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. However, as this programme is still in its infancy, some students, including in the sixth form, have a weak knowledge and understanding of these issues.

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	139666
Local authority	Torbay
Inspection number	450126

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Mowat
Principal	Katherine Davis Wills
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01803 617694
Email address	enquiries@devonstudioschool.co.uk

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