

Delta Independent School

Parliament Street, Consett, County Durham DH8 5DH

Inspection dates

13–15 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and assessment is not consistently good. Not all teachers use the information they have about pupils' abilities to plan work matched to their different starting points. Consequently, work is not always challenging enough for the most able pupils.
- Leaders monitor and assess each pupil's progress, attendance and behaviour regularly. They have been unable to compare the achievements of different groups of pupils over time because, until this term, assessment systems could not capture such information.
- Improvement plans do not state sharply enough the difference actions will make to the pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, or the school's improvement.
- The proprietor meets leaders and staff regularly to discuss the school's work and how well individual pupils are doing. However, formal records of these meetings and reports on pupils' achievements are limited. Consequently, the proprietor cannot check the impact of leaders' work in driving improvement in pupils' progress and achievements robustly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The proprietor, leaders and staff have a passion and commitment to do the best for their pupils. They have embraced well the challenges of moving from a part-time sports-based provider to become an independent school, focusing on high aspirations and achievement. It is too soon to see the full impact of their work.
- Pupils feel well supported and safe. They value the second chance they have at Delta, following unsuccessful experiences in mainstream school.
- Pupils and parents are highly positive about the school's work and impact. All pupils move on to education, employment or training by the end of key stage 4.
- Building trusting, respectful relationships with pupils lies at the heart of the school's work. This supports pupils' positive engagement in learning, improvements in behaviour, and the development of the personal qualities they need to be successful citizens in modern Britain.
- Pupils' attendance rates shoot up once they settle into Delta. They make at least expected progress in their learning from often low starting points on entry. Some pupils make good progress, particularly in geography, physical education (PE) and film studies.
- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning in order to ensure that all pupils can achieve their best by:
 - making sure teachers use the information they have about pupils' current abilities to plan work that moves them on quickly from those starting points and challenges the most able sufficiently.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - embedding the recent assessment system so leaders and the proprietor can check the progress, attendance and behaviour of different groups of pupils over time. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils, boys and girls and the most able pupils
 - sharpening improvement planning so that key priorities and actions are clear
 - ensuring that leaders and the proprietor can measure the difference that actions in plans will make to pupils' progress and achievements and the school's improvement
 - ensuring that the proprietor receives regular, formal reports about the work of the school and outcomes for pupils so that he can hold leaders to account more robustly for their impact.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have managed the change from a part-time sports-based alternative provision last autumn to a full-time independent school well. They have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. Key aspects of their work continue to be developed. Therefore it is too soon to see the full impact of leaders' commitment to achieving their vision to 'create a dynamic, vibrant and welcoming learning environment that will give rise to a life-long love of learning for all' and to ensuring that all pupils achieve their best.
- Leaders and the proprietor know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and have set about improving weaker areas of provision. For example, although opportunities to develop pupils' reading skills are effective, leaders know they need to broaden the range of books that pupils can read for interest or pleasure. They are taking action to tackle this. However, improvement plans contain insufficient measurable targets against which the impact of actions on weaker areas can be measured. It is therefore difficult for the proprietor to hold leaders to account robustly for the impact of their work.
- Leaders monitor and assess each pupil's progress, attendance and behaviour regularly. They provide detailed reports to the schools where pupils are dually registered and to parents. Until this term, the assessment system did not enable leaders to compare the achievements of different groups of pupils. This includes most-able pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils. As a result, leaders have not known whether there were differences in the achievements of groups, and if so, whether the differences were diminishing because of the school's work. While systems are now in place, it is too soon to evaluate differences between groups over time.
- Leadership of teaching and assessment is developing effectively. Leaders visit lessons regularly to review teaching and learning and pupils' workbooks. They provide feedback to staff on strengths and weaker areas of their practice. Areas for improvement are followed up at the next review of learning.
- Staff welcome the work to improve their skills as teachers. They feel that they are held to account more effectively for their pupils' achievements through the recent changes to assessment systems and more formal arrangements to manage their performance. Leaders know that more needs to be done to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best and teaching challenges all pupils to achieve well, particularly the most able.
- The curriculum has been developed effectively to ensure that pupils take a range of GCSE qualifications, to raise aspirations and to broaden their horizons. Most pupils are on-track to make the progress expected, and a few are making better than expected progress.
- The purposeful prioritisation of building trusting, respectful relationships helps pupils to settle into school, some for the first time in many months. It also impacts positively on pupils' behaviour and attitudes, which pupils themselves report improve greatly once they attend Delta. This focus contributes to the harmonious atmosphere found in the school and the rise in pupils' attendance rates.

- Leaders have also ensured that a successful focus on pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The personal, social, citizenship, health and economic curriculum (PSCHE), tutorials and regular one-to-one discussions help pupils learn how to respect and value the differences of others. Leaders capitalise on current affairs to increase pupils' understanding of issues such as democracy and the rule of law. Planned activities in the curriculum continue to broaden pupils' understanding of the diversity of faiths and cultures in the wider community.
- The school's aim is that every pupil will leave with the skills, confidence and personal qualities that will help them succeed as adults in their chosen careers and as active citizens in modern Britain. In-school guidance and support, as well as independent guidance from the local careers service, ensures that pupils are advised well on their next steps. Last year, all Year 11 pupils moved on successfully to their chosen destinations.

Governance

- The proprietor is responsible for the governance of the school. He is very involved in the school and visits regularly. The school does not receive additional funding for disadvantaged pupils or for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities because it receives the same, set daily rate for every pupil. However, the proprietor holds regular discussions with leaders and, at these meetings, checks the progress, attendance, behaviour and attitudes of each pupil. Consequently, he has a good understanding of individual pupil's achievements, the school's strengths and things that need to be better. The proprietor provides robust challenge on an informal basis but formal reports are limited. It is therefore difficult for the proprietor to hold leaders to account for the impact of their work over time.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Key safeguarding policies are up to date and in line with recent government requirements, as are procedures for the safe recruitment of staff. The school does not have a website but provides parents with the safeguarding policy at the pre-admission interview. It is also available to parents who request it at other times. Staff are trained regularly and have a good understanding of what to do when they identify safeguarding concerns, including when disclosures are made by pupils. Staff are also clear about what to do if concerns are identified regarding risks to pupils' safety through the extremist views of others, or the potential grooming or sexual exploitation of pupils. Individual risk assessments are in place for each pupil and for all activities. Leaders work closely with the mainstream schools where pupils are dually registered, and outside agencies when needed, to make sure pupils are safe and protected.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good. Sometimes teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough, particularly for the most able. When this occurs, the work set for pupils does not challenge them sufficiently.

While all pupils complete their work, some are not stretched to achieve highly because they repeat the same tasks throughout the lesson, even when they have already mastered a concept. This is sometimes the case in mathematics, which results in limited opportunities for pupils to work at greater depth.

- Until recently, the accuracy of information about pupils' learning provided by the mainstream schools has been too variable. Some information has been based on pupils' achievements when they left primary school, a gap of at least a year. As a result, teachers did not always have an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points. This contributed to some pupils tackling work that was too easy or covered in their earlier school lives. This year, leaders have demanded more up-to-date information when pupils arrive. They have also developed their own assessment of pupils' achievements on entry. This information is starting to be used by teachers to plan activities based on pupils' different starting points, but its use is still inconsistent.
- Teachers deploy teaching assistants effectively. This, together with the high staff-to-pupil ratios, means that there is always an adult available to support a pupil who is struggling, needs advice or a gentle reminder to get on with work. This ensures that pupils make the progress expected in their learning, from their often lower than average starting points. The very small proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also well supported to make similar progress to their peers.
- Staff generally use the school's marking and feedback policy effectively to identify how well pupils are achieving and to point out misconceptions or errors, including in grammar or spelling. Some teachers are adept at identifying learning points that pupils respond to and which pupils report are helpful to their understanding. Leaders know there is still work to do to make sure feedback across the school is as good as the best and are taking action to tackle this. They are also taking action to ensure that pupils' presentation skills are consistently good.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure, particularly in geography, film studies, English literature and PE. There are many opportunities in PE to build pupils' sporting, technical and team-building skills. Pupils are energised by aspects of film studies. They grapple successfully with the ways in which meaning is generated through film and how films reflect the social, cultural and political contexts in which they are made. Such study also contributes to pupils' cultural and social development well.
- Clearly planned schemes of work and effective teaching in English literature bring the subject to life for pupils whose previous experiences were unsatisfactory. Targeted questioning checks pupils' understanding and then challenges them to express their views beyond the mundane. One pupil explained how teachers help her to understand what she needs to do, and this gives her the confidence to have a go at answering the questions. This is a view echoed by many other pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils with fractured or unsuccessful previous experiences of school now expect that they are coming to school to learn and enjoy school. Pupils talk of being given a second chance,

and that they are treated respectfully and as 'adults'. They value the positive relationships they develop with adults and other pupils. Pupils particularly value the 'adult mentors', staff whom they trust and to whom they can go with a problem of any sort. Indeed, they say they could go to any adult and be sure of good support.

- Pupils believe small classes enable staff to know them well and ensure that they can get the support they need to help them overcome their previous barriers to learning. These barriers may include previously poor attitudes, poor behaviour, or social and emotional difficulties.
- The PSCH curriculum, tutorials and visitors to the school ensure that pupils learn how to keep safe and how to respond to risky situations. This includes keeping safe online and from the potential extremist views of others. Visits from the police ensure that pupils understand local risks, such as anti-social behaviour, grooming, knife crime, drugs and alcohol. The school nurse supports pupils' understanding of risks to their physical, emotional, sexual and mental health and, like staff, helps them in times of need.
- Pupils feel safe. They are adamant that inappropriate language, disrespect, or bullying of any description is simply not tolerated. This includes any prejudicial behaviour regarding race, gender, special educational needs and/or disabilities or sexual identity. Careful records of any incident are kept. These confirm the low proportion that take place.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' conduct in lessons and as they move around the school at break and lunchtimes is generally positive. Pupils are polite and respectful of adults, other pupils and visitors and are happy to share their views.
- Pupils report that the small classes and good relationships they have with adults help them to behave appropriately or to manage their own behaviour when they are having a 'bad day'. Timely one-to-one support is close at hand for anyone experiencing difficulties. This means that the learning of others is not unduly disrupted and pupils gain the support and advice they need to return to lessons quickly.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are tracked in every lesson. This provides an incentive for them to manage their own behaviour and reap the rewards identified in the school's behaviour policy. Pupils value this rewards-based process because it enables them to earn financial rewards and accolades such as 'student of the month'.
- Pupils themselves have high expectations of how they treat each other and, as a result, confidently report that everyone gets along well together. Older pupils act as good role models and support the induction of new and younger pupils by displaying the behaviour and attitudes expected in the school. Exclusions are rare and there is close liaison with the mainstream school when serious behaviour concerns are raised.
- While pupils' attendance rates remain below average, rates improve quickly once pupils arrive and settle into Delta. A high proportion of pupils start Delta having had either little education for many months or periods of prolonged absence. Significant work is undertaken with pupils, their mainstream schools, families and agencies such as local authority attendance officers to raise expectations of attendance and tackle any barriers.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Delta has been registered as a school for just over a year. The 2016 Year 11 examination results were first that the school had contributed to fully, and many pupils had been absent from their mainstream school for significant periods. As a result of the gaps in their education, a lower than average proportion of pupils gained GCSE qualifications.
- Observations of learning, reviews of pupils' books and school assessment information for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils show that these pupils are making at least the progress expected from their often low starting points in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, few are making rapid progress.
- Until this term, inaccuracies in the information mainstream schools have provided on pupils' entry has meant that work has not been set closely enough to pupils' prior skills, knowledge and understanding consistently. Improvements this term are starting to make their mark. Books in geography and English literature show that some pupils are making good progress this term. The more accurate assessment information the school holds indicates that a much greater proportion of Year 11 pupils are on-track to achieve their target grades in the GCSE subjects they are studying.
- The progress of Year 9 pupils is harder to gauge as they have only been in school for a term and there has only been one set of assessments of their work. However, pupils' books and observation of learning show they have settled down to work and, as with the older pupils, are generally making the progress expected from their usually low starting points. Few pupils are making rapid progress because teachers do not stretch the most able pupils sufficiently.
- Gauging the progress of disadvantaged pupils is also difficult as again, until this term, the school's assessment systems did not enable staff to track the progress of different groups of pupils, nor compare it to national averages. While the system is now in place, it is too soon in its development to be able to show whether there are differences in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school. Rates of progress, when compared to other pupils nationally, are not yet strong, not least due to the significant disruption to pupils' previous learning.
- The small proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively in their learning and so make similar progress to their peers.
- Pupils read regularly and they are encouraged to read out loud in class. The school is successfully reigniting pupils' previous engagement in reading. Leaders are aware that they need to encourage pupils to read for information and pleasure more regularly. They are currently securing a range of additional books to whet pupils' appetites.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal development and become confident and self-assured members of the school community. They are prepared to ask questions in lessons because they feel safe and trusted.
- The school's work and support from an external careers officer ensures that pupils are guided well on to their next steps in education, training or employment. All pupils last year moved on successfully to their chosen destinations. Pupils are grateful for the work the school does to prepare them for the future world of work. This includes the preparation of a curriculum vitae, interview practice and escorted travel to further education taster sessions.

School details

Unique reference number	142474
DfE registration number	840/6014
Inspection number	10020870

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Mr William Robson
Chair	Not applicable
Vice-principals	Helen Daglish and Neil Curran
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,750
Telephone number	01207 502680
Website	No website
Email address	helen.delta.school@gmail.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Delta was registered by the Department for Education as an independent school for up to 80 boys and girls aged between 13 and 16 years in October 2015. It was previously a part-time alternative provision offering a sports-based programme for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion.
- The school is housed in the Consett YMCA building. School leaders report that staff who work for the YMCA do not use the building during school hours. Pupils can access a range of activities after school that operate from the building.
- The school offers full-time or part-time provision to local mainstream schools for pupils at

risk of permanent exclusion. All pupils currently on roll attend full-time and are dually registered with their mainstream school.

- All pupils are of white British heritage.
- A small number of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and have an education, health and care plan.
- The school's aims are to 'create a dynamic, vibrant and welcoming learning environment that will give rise to a life-long love of learning for all in our community'.
- The school does not use any off-site alternative provision.
- This is the school's first standard independent school inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector held discussions with the three vice-principals, staff, the proprietor and the school's external improvement partner. A telephone discussion was held with a leader from one of the mainstream schools where some pupils are dually registered. Another telephone discussion was held with the Member of Parliament for the local area.
- The inspector talked to pupils informally as she visited classrooms and during each school day. She also spoke formally to a group of pupils on the final day of the inspection.
- The inspector observed learning in all classes across the school. The vice-principal who leads on teaching and learning joined the inspector on two of these visits.
- A wide range of school documents were scrutinised. These included the school's evaluation of its work, improvement planning, safeguarding policies and procedures, and documents required as part of the independent schools standards.
- Two comments from parents who responded to Parent View, the inspection questionnaire, were taken into account, along with the school's recent survey of parental views. Responses to nine staff questionnaires were considered. Outcomes of the school's recent pupil survey were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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