

# Discovery School

Blandford Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 3BT

## Inspection dates

10–11 May 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Since the school opened in 2014, leaders and managers have struggled to achieve the school's stated aims. Far fewer pupils than anticipated have been recruited, resulting in the curriculum becoming narrow and unbalanced.
- There is currently no teaching of the humanities, the arts or of a modern foreign language. It is unacceptable that there is no teaching of physical education. The curriculum is failing to meet pupils' needs and does not prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is underdeveloped. The needs of some pupils are not being identified. Some parents express concerns that their children's needs are not being met.
- The quality of teaching is variable. Leaders were slow to set out their expectations for teaching and learning and have not held teachers to account tightly enough.
- Despite broadly average outcomes in science, technology and mathematics last year, examination results in other subjects, including English, were disappointing. Leaders do not expect results in 2017 to improve.
- Not all pupils value their education. This is reflected in levels of attendance that have been well below the national picture. Although now rising, attendance remains below average.
- Outcomes on 16 to 19 study programmes require improvement. Results in 2016 were generally weaker than seen nationally and the progress of learners currently in the sixth form is no better than average.
- The trustees have belatedly recognised that the school's staffing structure was not fit for purpose. A restructure is currently underway in order to deploy more resources to front-line staffing. A degree of uncertainty remains over future leadership arrangements.

### The school has the following strengths

- The principal has created a positive culture and enjoys the loyalty and backing of her staff. All members of staff are keen to address the school's weaknesses and achieve the school's vision.
- Many pupils enjoy the focused curriculum and benefit from the well-resourced facilities available to them. Pupils access appropriate destinations when they leave the school.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is likely to be of the opinion that this school has serious weaknesses because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
  - providing a broader and more balanced curriculum so that pupils' academic and personal development needs are well met
  - ensuring that physical education contributes to pupils' health and well-being
  - strengthening the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and ensuring that special educational needs funding is used to good effect
  - developing an effective strategy for the use of the pupil premium so that eligible pupils receive additional support and attain more highly, especially in English and mathematics
  - enhancing the current programme for pupils' personal, social, health and economic learning so that pupils' appreciation of fundamental British values is strengthened
  - improving the programme of professional development and using performance management systems robustly so that the quality of teaching becomes at least consistently good.
- Improve the quality of teaching, in order to improve outcomes at key stage 4 and on 16 to 19 study programmes, by:
  - ensuring that teachers use information on pupils' starting points to adapt the work they provide to pupils of different abilities
  - ensuring the most able pupils are challenged consistently and that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the support they need to make good progress
  - capturing and sharing the best practice that exists in the school and drawing on expertise in other providers where necessary
  - strengthening capacity to provide additional support in lessons and for groups of pupils who fall behind and need to catch up
  - ensuring that learners receive appropriate advice, guidance and support to successfully complete their 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Sustain improvements in attendance and reduce the number of pupils who persistently miss school, by tracking patterns of attendance more comprehensively and targeting efforts to improve attendance where the greatest gains can be made.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken, in

order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Senior leaders and trustees of the school have struggled to achieve the school's stated aims. Despite having excellent facilities they have been unable to recruit the anticipated numbers of pupils. The school is registered to accept up to 700 pupils but currently there are fewer than 200 pupils on roll. Consequently, the school's operational budget has been lower than expected and resources have not been allocated well enough to meet the needs of pupils.
- Trustees have only very recently begun to adjust staffing in recognition that too much money was spent on leadership and not enough on front-line staff. For example, the school has very limited resources to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or to provide additional support for pupils who fall behind. A restructure of staffing is currently underway and some senior leaders have recently left the school. A revised leadership model is yet to be fully established.
- The principal has worked tirelessly to establish the school. She articulates a distinct ethos centred on pupils 'coming to work, not coming to school'. Pupils and staff are committed to the school's concept and many pupils find the specialist curriculum motivational. However, the principal recognises that her evaluation of the school's performance has been overly generous and that time will be needed before pupils begin to achieve the outcomes expected. Her staff are loyal to her, keen and dedicated to achieving the school's aims.
- The school's specialist curriculum centred on science, technology, engineering and mathematics has narrowed since the school opened because not enough pupils have been recruited or opted to follow subjects outside of the school's specialist curriculum. As a result, the school does not meet its statutory duty to provide a curriculum with breadth and balance. The school does not timetable lessons in any arts subjects or the humanities and there are no modern foreign languages. It is unacceptable that the school makes no formal provision for pupils' physical development. There is some limited extra-curricular activity in these areas, provided flexibly in response to pupils' interests, but it is not accessed by many pupils. Consequently, the curriculum fails to meet pupils' personal and academic needs.
- The narrowness of the curriculum also means that work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is underdeveloped.
- Leaders have not been able to secure good outcomes for pupils. Rates of progress on courses offered have been variable and in some subjects, including English, examination results have been weak. Mistakes have been made with exam entry policy and, until recently, not enough was done to develop the quality of teaching. Despite some weak examination results in 2016, trustees awarded pay progression to all teachers.
- Senior leaders are yet to develop effective systems for tracking pupils' progress. Reports to trustees have not been in sufficient detail to allow them to properly scrutinise the progress of different groups of pupils. Consequently, trustees have not been able to adequately monitor the impact of special educational needs funding or the pupil premium. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and

disadvantaged pupils, made inadequate progress last year and those currently in the school are making inconsistent progress.

- The parents of some pupils who have special educational needs have concerns that their children are not receiving the support they should. Inspectors found that the school does not have an accredited special educational needs coordinator and that systems to identify, support and review the progress of these pupils are underdeveloped. The principal has recognised this and is taking steps to tighten up procedures.

## **Governance of the school**

- The chair and vice-chair of trustees are staunchly committed to the school's success. Under the current chairmanship, trustees' scrutiny of the school's work has increased and they are beginning to receive better information on which to base strategic decisions. Their recent actions to restructure staffing and shift more resources to where they are most needed shows they have a better understanding of what needs to be done to meet the needs of pupils. Records of recent meetings show trustees had begun to ask questions over the limitations of the narrow curriculum.
- The trustees have not, however, provided sufficient scrutiny or supported the principal well enough. Until recently, checks did not identify the lack of resourcing to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils.
- The sponsor and the trustees did not do enough to promote and market the school when it first opened. The lack of numbers recruited and associated limitations on the school's budget continue to hamper efforts to achieve the school's vision.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders make appropriate checks on all adults who work in the school and provide them with regular training to ensure they know what actions to take if they have any concerns about a pupil's safety or welfare.
- Pupils are taught about risks to their safety and about how to stay safe when online. The school has good systems to identify the inappropriate use of school networks and mobile devices.
- Senior staff are diligent in ensuring that child protection referrals are managed well. Good records are kept and timely actions are taken in conjunction with parents and external services where necessary. Leaders have created a culture in which all members of staff are vigilant and caring of pupils.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable across classes and year groups.
- Teachers do not consistently use information they have on pupils' starting points to shape the tasks and resources they provide. This means that some classes made up of

pupils with widely different starting points are given the same work. As a result, the work is too challenging for some pupils and not demanding enough for others.

- Some teachers do not do enough to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors observed some pupils struggling to access the tasks provided and receiving little help during lessons. In some lessons, these pupils did not make the progress they should. The school has recently employed a learning support assistant and intends to employ more in the future to provide in-class support and additional sessions for pupils who need extra help.
- Some teachers ask thoughtful questions that encourage pupils to think on their feet. They ensure that learning progresses at a brisk pace and engages pupils actively. Occasionally, teachers ask too many questions in quick succession and do not give pupils the time they need to formulate answers.
- On other occasions, inspectors observed learning which progressed slowly and did not challenge or motivate pupils effectively.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics because sequences of lessons are well designed and challenge pupils of different abilities effectively. Teachers' good subject knowledge and high expectations ensure that mathematics lessons are productive and engaging.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm, friendly and respectful. The school promotes an informal approach and encourages pupils to use teachers' first names. Teachers are good at encouraging pupils to be responsible for their own actions and to manage their behaviour well by themselves.
- The standard of presentation of work is too variable. Some pupils take real pride in their work and develop a high standard of grammar. Most teachers have begun to provide opportunities for pupils to write at length and most expect pupils to make corrections to their spelling and punctuation.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- All pupils receive a programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) which covers a broad range of topics about personal safety and promotes an awareness of different faiths, cultures and values. Although this programme makes a positive contribution, some aspects need further development. For example, pupils are yet to visit different places of worship or meet people from a range of different cultures.
- The school has some members of staff that are skilled in supporting pupils whose behaviour is more challenging or who are more socially or emotionally vulnerable. The school provides good support for these pupils at social times and has introduced programmes to promote good mental health for all. However, there are no arrangements in place to provide physical exercise. Physical education is not on the school timetable and extra-curricular opportunities to take part in sport are limited.

Pupils' physical well-being is not being promoted effectively.

- Pupils say they feel safe and say there is little bullying. This is confirmed by the very few incidents of bullying that have been recorded in the school's records.
- The school's ethos and culture helps pupils to develop and mature. Many pupils make long journeys to attend the school and need to be well organised and independent. A focus on project-based learning also develops pupils' independence and research skills and helps to prepare them for the next stage of their education.
- The school provides pupils with a well-considered programme of careers information and advice, and an external careers adviser is employed to give impartial guidance. Good support has been provided to help pupils find suitable courses when they leave the school and to those learners who chose not to complete 16 to 19 study programmes. The quality of this advice and guidance ensured that all pupils found places in further education, employment or training last year.
- School leaders make appropriate checks on the alternative education providers. As a result, the few pupils who attend these placements receive an appropriate curriculum, are safe and attend well.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although the vast majority of pupils conduct themselves well and are polite and courteous, some drift off task and do not apply themselves well enough in lessons. Some pupils do not have sufficiently positive attitudes to learning and need to strive harder to reach the targets the school has set for them.
- Some pupils do not value their education enough. Levels of attendance have been well below the national average and some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have attended poorly. However, as the quality of teaching has begun to improve, levels of attendance have begun to rise. Overall attendance for this academic year to date is around 94% which, although still below the national average for secondary schools, represents a significant improvement on the previous year. Leaders do not track patterns of attendance in enough detail to inform where to target their efforts.
- The vast majority of pupils abide by the school's dress code. There is no formal school uniform, but pupils dress smartly, in line with the school's aim of preparing pupils for the world of work.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Pupils enter the school at different points. Some join the school at the start of Year 9 while others join at the start of Year 10. On average, pupils who join the school had broadly average levels of attainment when they left primary school. Discovery School staff make their own assessment of pupils' level of ability when they arrive. These assessments indicate that many pupils had not made the progress expected of them in their former secondary schools.

- Examination results in 2016 and scrutiny of the work of pupils currently in the school show that the progress pupils make across different subjects is variable and requires improvement. Last year, pupils underachieved on a number of courses, including English, core and additional science, history and geography. No pupils attained the English baccalaureate.
- Leaders have worked hard to address the weaknesses in English that led to poor examination results in 2016. As a result, pupils currently in the school have begun to make better progress in the subject. However, leaders know that pupils in the current Year 11 are still not making the progress they should. The work in pupil's books is variable in standard and in the quality of presentation.
- Examination results in 2016 showed that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, underachieved. This remains the case for pupils currently in the school. However, the ongoing efforts of leaders to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have begun to ensure more consistent progress for all groups of pupils.
- The school's most recent assessment information indicates that outcomes in GCSE examinations in 2017 are unlikely to show any significant improvement on 2016. However, the progress and attainment of other year groups is more promising. This is because teaching has begun to improve and staffing is more settled and secure.
- Pupils make sound progress on some courses, especially those closely aligned to the school's specialism. In particular, rates of progress in mathematics, computer science, electronics, product design and chemistry at least match those seen nationally. Consequently, levels of attainment on these courses were in line with those seen nationally in 2016.
- The few pupils placed in alternative provision are following programmes of learning with a reduced number of qualifications. These pupils are yet to take examinations, so the impact of these placements cannot yet be evaluated.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils receive good support to help them with their next steps when they leave the school. The numbers of pupils choosing to progress into the school's sixth form is rising, although most pupils to date have chosen other further education providers or apprenticeships. Last year, all pupils secured places in further education, employment or training.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Requires improvement**

- Post-16 provision has had a difficult start in Discovery School. The number of learners recruited to study programmes has been much lower than anticipated. In 2015 leaders recognised that some of the learners they recruited were not of the calibre to be successful and were disappointed at the high numbers of learners that did not complete their programme. Last year, around half of all learners in Year 12 did not progress into Year 13. Tougher entry requirements to begin A-level study were implemented from the start of 2016.
- Relatively small numbers of learners took A-level and AS-level examinations last summer. Outcomes were generally weaker than seen nationally and few learners attained top grades. However, pupils did make better than average progress in

mathematics, product design and chemistry. The school met the minimum standard for 16 to 19 study programmes.

- The range of subjects available for learners to follow is narrow and focused entirely on the school's speciality of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. There is some flexibility for learners to follow other courses through arrangements with the nearby Newcastle Sixth Form College. For example, one learner is currently studying A-level English through this partnership. Many learners take the extended project qualification and some innovative and exciting research has been done drawing on industry links. However, the relatively narrow range of subjects on offer means that some pupils choose other sixth forms or further education colleges on completion of their GCSE studies.
- Pupils who enter the sixth form without a GCSE grade C or better in English receive additional teaching. However, no learners improved their grade in re-sit examinations last year. In response, the school has tripled the time given to learners this year, which has resulted in four out of eight learners successfully improving their grade. All learners currently in the sixth form have a GCSE grade C or better in mathematics.
- Most learners undertake a work experience as part of their programme. Learners are encouraged to arrange these opportunities themselves. Those that are unable to do so receive some help to find a suitable placement, although not all are successful in doing so. The school has some good links with local industry, but is yet to exploit these links fully enough to ensure that work-related learning is an integral part of all learners' experience.
- All learners receive a programme of personal, social, health and economic education. This programme is enriched by the use of external partners. For example, sessions have been run on personal financial management, alcohol and drugs awareness, sexual health and job applications. The school nurse is available to provide advice and guidance to learners who seek it. Learners told inspectors that the school council is yet to function effectively.
- The head of sixth form has, through his actions, begun to shape and improve the quality of 16 to 19 study provision. He has improved transition arrangements between GCSE and A-level courses and is reshaping the curriculum in order to provide a vocational pathway. He has also begun to make more regular checks on the quality of teaching. As a result, the progress of learners currently in the school is improving and becoming more consistent across the different subjects offered.

## School details

Unique reference number	140976
Local authority	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Inspection number	10031942

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	188
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerard Garvey
Principal	Dr Wendy Allen
Telephone number	0191 272 1111
Website	<a href="http://www.discoveryschool.org.uk">www.discoveryschool.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@discoveryschool.org.uk">admin@discoveryschool.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about its strategy for the use and evaluation of the pupil premium on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about its pupil premium strategy.
- Discovery School is much smaller than the average secondary school. The school is part of a single academy trust and is sponsored by Newcastle College Group.
- The school describes itself as a specialist industry-driven technical school focusing on a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum.

- Around four out of five pupils who attend the school are boys.
- A small proportion of pupils belong to minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- Three pupils currently attend different alternative providers on a full- or part-time basis at the Bridges School, Newcastle College and the Hospital Home Tuition Service.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor targets, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress at key stage 4.
- Two senior leaders recently left the school and the principal has announced she will retire at the end of the summer term 2017. The trustees are seeking to appoint a new principal.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across all year groups and the sixth form. A number of observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of their current work. In addition inspectors scrutinised in detail a sample of work from pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11.
- Inspectors also observed the general climate around the school at social times.
- Meetings were held with the principal, school bursar and other leaders, a group of teachers, a group of subject leaders and groups of pupils, including learners on 16 to 19 study programmes. Further meetings were held with the chair and vice-chair of trustees and two other trustees.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, policies, assessment information and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors looked at records of attendance, behaviour, minutes of trustees' meetings and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors took account of the 63 responses to the online survey, Parent View, the 15 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 22 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

## Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Manuel

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. [www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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