

# Discovery School

Blandford Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 3BT

## Inspection dates

21–22 March 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Inadequate</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Inadequate</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Inadequate</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Inadequate</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Inadequate</b>

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- The strategic actions of leaders, governors and the sponsor are inadequate, having failed to make any meaningful headway in tackling the school's structural and operational issues.
- Educational standards have deteriorated since the last inspection. Ineffective safeguarding has resulted in several serious incidents. Those responsible have not shown the capacity to improve the school and it has hit rock bottom.
- Working on a tight budget, with leaders pulled in many directions, has exacerbated the situation. The promotion of British values and other key curriculum aspects are neglected.
- The impact of teaching is inadequate because, over time and currently in the school, pupils' learning and development are slow and show little sign of improvement when set against their starting points. The difference between the most and least effective teaching is wide.
- Too much teaching fails to engage and inspire pupils. Expectations of what pupils are capable of are often too low and too many pupils are not suitably challenged. Staff who teach outside of their own subject are not always competent to do so. The curriculum does not match pupils' needs, interests or aspirations.
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate because a significant minority of pupils show a lack of respect for each other and staff. Attendance is low and persistent absence is high. The frequency of dangerous and unacceptable behaviour is shockingly high. Not all pupils feel safe. Not all pupils are kept safe at all times.
- Outcomes are inadequate because, over time and currently, significant numbers of pupils are underachieving. This is especially so for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and high-prior-attaining pupils. There is little sign of improvement.
- In 2017, the progress made by Year 11 pupils was in the bottom 1% nationally and below the government's minimum standards. This was the case across subjects. In 2016, Year 11 pupils' progress was well below average.
- 16 to 19 study programmes are inadequate due to ineffective leadership and provision. As a result, students have made inadequate progress over time. The study programme principles are not fully embraced, and students are not always well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

### The school has the following strengths

- On occasion, pupils learn and behave well, especially in the top sets when engaging, challenging work is provided.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

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

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors so that the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils are dramatically enhanced and enable the school to offer at least an adequate standard of education by ensuring that:
  - senior leaders have the capacity to effect significant and sustained improvements in the quality of education, ensuring that the curriculum meets all pupils' needs
  - suitable structural and operational protocols are implemented and consistently applied so that the quality of education the school provides improves significantly and rapidly, with suitable financial resources available to help drive improvement
  - quality assurance procedures and the management of teaching and learning improve markedly so that staff improve the quality of their practice and its impact on pupils' learning and development substantially
  - all staff embrace the recently introduced and well-conceived improvement strategies to develop a more consistent approach to pupils' learning and development
  - leaders at all levels maintain a relentless focus on accelerating all pupils' progress, especially where the pupils have suffered from the effects of weaker teaching over time, so that they regain the lost ground in their learning and reach their potential
  - governors' effectiveness improves and they have the knowledge and awareness of the school's work to hold it to account for the quality of education it provides, and fulfil their statutory responsibilities more assiduously than they do at present
  - fundamental British values, pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and personal development are all promoted and embedded effectively
  - the sponsor's impact on strategically supporting and challenging the school's quality of education, its growth and ongoing viability is markedly improved
  - sufficient resources and suitably qualified staff are in place to deliver the recommendations of the pupil premium review, and these pupils' outcomes improve.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning so that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities and pupils with high prior attainment, make the strong progress they are capable of in all subjects by ensuring that:
  - leaders use the school's most effective teaching as a model for other teachers to learn from and ensure a greater impact from the training teachers receive
  - inadequate teaching is eliminated and the predominance of teaching which does not challenge, inspire or motivate pupils, and causes them to become disengaged and

ill-disciplined, which slows their learning and progress, is also eliminated

- teaching in all subjects, especially English, mathematics, science and technology, improves and, as a consequence, pupils make more effective progress from their starting points in those subjects so that underachievement is eliminated
- staff are appropriately confident and competent to teach their specialist subjects and those they are being asked to teach outside of their specialist subject
- all staff have high expectations of what pupils are capable of and suitable stretch and challenge of pupils in lessons is the norm rather than the exception
- teaching and the curriculum meet the needs, interests and aspirations of all pupils, including those with education, health and care plans.

■ Improve the quality and effectiveness of the sixth form by ensuring that:

- leadership of the 16 to 19 study programmes improves dramatically and makes certain that the school is fully embracing all the principles of the study programme
- the quality of teaching improves substantially so that the status quo of student underachievement is eliminated and all students make strong progress from their starting points, especially girls, high-prior-attaining students and disadvantaged students
- safeguarding arrangements are consistently effective and robust, including when students access work experience
- all students are well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training when they leave the school.

■ Embed a culture of safeguarding through securing substantial improvements in the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and in the leadership of these, by ensuring that:

- arrangements and practice for safeguarding pupils in school, during educational visits and when they are on work experience, are consistently rigorous and effective
- suitable staff actively fulfil the roles and responsibilities of a designated safeguarding leader as required by statutory authorities
- all staff consistently apply the behaviour, teaching, learning and assessment policies to raise standards and deal with unacceptable behaviour in an effective way
- the root causes of pupils' ill-discipline, defiance and dangerous behaviour are addressed to effect substantial improvements in pupils' safety and feeling of safety
- a transparent approach exists which ensures that pupils, staff and parents are assured that any safeguarding issues arising are dealt with appropriately and resolved equitably
- the need for isolation and fixed-term and permanent exclusion is reduced significantly and pupils' behaviour is invariably good
- rates of attendance improve and persistent absence reduces so they are at least in line with national averages, especially among disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

An external review of governance 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

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers at all levels have had little or no impact on addressing the deep-rooted issues facing the school. In fact, the standard of education the school provides has deteriorated substantially. Senior leaders are swamped and largely unsupported, and are unable to stem the tide.
- Middle leaders are not always clear about their roles and what is expected of them. There is too little accountability for the inadequate progress pupils make as a result of inadequate teaching and assessment practice across subjects and groups of pupils.
- Not all staff are fully on board with the vision for the school's future, and this results in some of them failing to follow new policies and protocols. This disjointed situation is hampering the successful implementation of well-conceived improvement strategies.
- Quality assurance arrangements have not been sufficiently rigorous to raise the quality of teaching, or to ensure that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, high-prior-attaining pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers are not effectively led or managed to ensure that their practice secures pupils' good learning.
- Leaders have not used additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities effectively. As a result, outcomes for these vulnerable pupils remain poor due to provision that has remained ineffective over time. There is little sign of pupils regaining any lost ground. Parental concerns about the school not meeting the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are justified.
- The curriculum is evolving as the school seeks to add more breadth and balance to its provision. Some pupils embrace the science, technology, engineering and mathematics focused curriculum, while others are frustrated that their interests in humanities and the arts are not catered for. The introduction of physical education (PE), geography and a modern foreign language since the last inspection is welcome but the content and quality of the curriculum overall are highly variable.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is ineffective and does not have a positive effect on pupils' personal development. There is no coherent approach to embedding fundamental British values. As a result, pupils are not well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils do not consistently show respect for, or tolerance of, others' faiths or cultures, or tolerance of people who appear different to them. Nor do pupils always recognise the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of their actions. Racism, sexism and bullying persist.
- Responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, show that a significant minority of parents have negative views of the school's performance, especially around behaviour, teaching and leadership. Nearly a third of parents who responded would not recommend the school. Inspectors found that parents' concerns were well founded. Staff morale is not high.
- Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are loyal to the school and report that they are well supported. Inspection evidence refutes this, particularly in relation to helping them deal with poor pupil behaviour. On occasion, NQTs are left exposed to teaching several

classes in subjects outside of their specialism, with little support from more experienced colleagues. It is recommended the school does not appoint more NQTs until it is confident that it can give them more effective support than they currently receive.

- The sponsor has taken various actions designed to kick-start the school's recovery. To date, evidence indicates that their impact has been negligible. The school has not grown as rapidly in size as envisaged. This has put an extraordinary strain on the school's finances. It operates on a tight budget, which limits the resources the school has to run efficiently and effectively.

## **Governance of the school**

- Over time, the actions of governors have not resulted in any discernible improvement in the quality of education. Membership of the governing body has changed by 70% since the last inspection in an attempt to introduce governors with the right skill-set and acumen to strategically support and challenge school improvement and hold leaders to account.
- While governors are committed, they do not know the school well and were unable to comment authoritatively on key aspects of its work, such as the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Governors were not convincing in how they hold leaders to account. There are key failings in their statutory responsibilities, including oversight of safeguarding. One governor displayed narrow-minded views about pupils from particular backgrounds, which was deeply troubling.
- Governors have not ensured that the website and policies meet statutory requirements.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Safeguarding in practice is inadequate, which is reflected in several serious incidents that have occurred. There is a distinct lack of rigour around day-to-day practice and lines of accountability. The ability of leaders to manage safeguarding effectively is not secure. The school's work with appropriate external agencies is underdeveloped.
- Over time, the school has not had a suitable designated safeguarding leader and/or a responsible person who had the required time, influence and awareness of the role's responsibilities. Staff lack vigilance, which puts pupils at risk. The school lacks a clear safeguarding ethos, and a root and branch change in culture and effectiveness is needed.
- The necessary checks are made on staff before they start to work at the school. However, when staff are dismissed for serious safeguarding reasons, it is unclear whether all the proper authorities are notified.
- Staff have accessed suitable training but this has not resulted in them always ensuring that pupils are kept safe. The school does not have a strong culture of safeguarding.
- The negative attitudes of a sizeable minority of pupils and some negligent behaviour by staff mean that there are well-founded concerns about safety. Not all pupils always feel

safe and they are not always confident that their concerns will be dealt with suitably.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Inadequate

- Compelling evidence from observations of pupils' learning, evaluation of published data and scrutiny of pupils' work and current assessment information, along with discussion with pupils about their knowledge, understanding and skills, confirm that the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress is inadequate over time, and currently. This is the case for most groups of pupils, including high-prior-attaining pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and low-prior-attaining pupils. This is also the case in most subjects, including the school's specialist subjects and English.
- The difference between the most and least effective practice is wide. Teaching is not good enough to ensure that pupils make the progress they are capable of or regain lost ground in their learning caused by their prior underachievement.
- Teachers' questioning is often weak, undemanding and fails to deepen pupils' thinking. Teaching too often fails to develop the secure grasp of the skills, knowledge and experiences that pupils need to cement their learning and ensure they are well-prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. The most effective teaching is not used as a model for other teachers to learn from. The impact from the training teachers receive on pupils' learning is not currently checked.
- Inspectors witnessed too many teachers struggling to meet the varying needs of the different groups of pupils the school serves. This often resulted in a decline in pupils' behaviour, which slowed their learning and progress. Too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of and so fail to challenge them sufficiently.
- The weaknesses in teaching quality are compounded by ongoing instability in staffing. Several classes have had numerous different teachers over the past six months, resulting in a lack of continuity in pupils' learning. This has denied pupils the opportunity to build secure working relationships with their teachers. Moreover, pupils are falling behind in their work and, in the worst cases, their work has gone 'missing' as teachers have come and gone. The school's assessment policy is not followed by all staff; consequently, pupils do not always know what the next steps in their learning are.
- Middle leaders' assertions of improved teaching and learning are based on subjective hearsay rather than hard evidence. Teachers do not always possess the confidence or competence to deliver their own specialist subject and/or those they are being asked to deliver outside of their specialist subject. Not enough is done to improve the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those with education, health and care plans, so that their needs are better met. The isolation room is exceptionally bleak. During the inspection, there was no evidence of the purposeful and/or restorative justice work that was claimed to take place here. Pupils were merely marking time.
- There are some vulnerable staff in the school, including NQTs who are not being given the additional support that would benefit them at this key stage of their young careers.
- Inspectors saw features of teaching that pupils found engaging and challenging. Sadly, this was in a very small minority of cases, and usually involved the top sets only; high-

quality teaching throughout the school is far from the norm.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Inadequate**

### Personal development and welfare

- Pupils' personal development and welfare are inadequate and their intolerance and lack of respect for staff and each other are deeply concerning.
- Many pupils shared a sense of dissatisfaction with the school as it exists. They do not feel a sense of cohesion conducive to building a close-knit, integrated school community. Several pupils told inspectors they are not proud of their school.
- Some pupils face bullying on a daily basis and racist behaviour is not dealt with effectively or challenged consistently, and so it persists. Inspectors heard depressing testimony from pupils of their ordeals and the perceived lack of effective adult support.
- The curriculum for pupils' personal development does not meaningfully address key issues prevalent in the school, such as racism, sexism and bullying. It does not promote fundamental British values. Promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is weak.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. At times, pupils are not safe. The number of recorded behaviour incidents is very high for a school of this size, being well in excess of 4,200 between September 2017 and 21 March 2018. Placing pupils in isolation is a regularly used sanction. Fixed-period and permanent exclusions are extremely high. There is little or no evidence that the school is able to moderate or change pupils' unacceptable and sometimes dangerous behaviour.
- A hard core of pupils display riotous behaviour and they roam the school in a predatory manner. The small numbers of girls and others who are singled out as different are vulnerable and do not always feel safe.
- There is a general lack of respect and self-control in a number of classrooms. Several classes and Year 9 pupils in particular are currently barred from using machinery or the computer suite because of safety concerns and their poor behaviour.
- Despite a high staff presence during the inspection, inspectors witnessed countless incidents of poor and dangerous behaviour in classrooms and at social times. At times, staff were unable to cope. The situation is compounded by some staff not adhering to the school's behaviour policy. This is confusing for pupils and dilutes the potential impact of sanctions, as staff have varying thresholds of what constitutes poor behaviour.
- Attendance is consistently low, while persistent absence is higher than average. This is especially true for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. There has been little tangible improvement, despite the school's efforts to raise the profile and importance of good attendance. Pupils' punctuality to lessons is variable.

## Outcomes for pupils

## inadequate

- Pupils' progress in most subjects, including the school's specialist subjects and English, indicates that they have been, and are, underachieving significantly when set against their starting points. This is the case for most pupils, but especially for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and high-prior-attaining pupils. There is little or no sign of improvement.
- In 2016, outcomes for Year 11 pupils were unacceptable in most subjects. Overall progress was significantly below the national average. Pupils made particularly poor progress in English and humanities subjects. In addition, disadvantaged pupils made poor progress in mathematics. Pupils' attainment compared with pupils who have the same starting points was too low.
- Analysis of the 2017 results shows that pupils' progress was in the bottom 1% nationally. Once again, most groups underachieved significantly. The proportions of pupils achieving a pass or strong passes in both English and mathematics were much lower than the averages. In 2017, the school's results were below government floor standards.
- Senior leaders' monitoring and evaluation of current pupils' progress strongly indicate that pupils throughout the school are making slow progress when set against their starting points. This view chimes with inspectors' evaluation of pupils' work and the discussions inspectors had with pupils about their learning and progress. Middle leaders' and governors' assertions of an improving progress picture are not borne out by the evidence and betray an over-generous view of the current situation.
- Inspectors do not deem the school's assessment system to be wholly credible, because the overwhelming first-hand evidence negates the more positive picture painted. Senior leaders accept that, despite some individual success stories, outcomes in external examinations in 2018 for the majority of pupils will be disappointing given their starting points. The decision for some Year 11 pupils to complete a two-year geography syllabus in one year has affected these pupils' chances of success in other subjects; pupils report having fewer science lessons to accommodate more geography lessons.
- Leaders recognise that urgent action is required to halt the decline and to kick-start a rapid and sustained recovery. In order for this to happen, all responsible parties will need to come together and work much more cohesively and effectively than they have to date. Everyone needs to accept responsibility for making a difference to the life chances of all pupils by doing everything they can to ensure pupils achieve their academic potential. Greater resourcing, increased stability in staffing and substantial improvements in leadership are all non-negotiables going forward. It will take nothing less than a relentless focus on accelerating all pupils' progress to effect the necessary improvements.
- The school's work to develop pupils' reading and literacy skills requires improvement.



## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Inadequate

- Leaders have not ensured that the school fully embraces the key principles of the study programme. Consequently, not all students receive meaningful work experience or volunteering opportunities. Nor do they all benefit from non-qualification activities or a coherent and comprehensive package of independent careers information, advice and guidance. This means that not all students are receiving opportunities that will develop and promote their employability skills.
- Students' progress in the sixth form is too slow overall, and it varies too much across subjects. In 2016, the progress made by A-level students was significantly below the national average. In 2017, A-level students with high prior attainment made poor progress, and progress at AS level was significantly below the national average. Female students make particularly slow progress. The cumulative effect of this is that too many students are ill-prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Teaching has had an inadequate impact on students' learning and progress over time. There are some encouraging fledgling signs of improvement in individual classes. However, evidence is insufficiently compelling to indicate that the overall quality of teaching has risen substantially. The school's data suggesting strong improvement is not credible and does not align with evidence from work scrutiny and senior leaders' own monitoring. Inspectors' observations confirm a highly variable picture across subjects.
- Students study a narrow range of subjects based on the school's speciality of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This is supplemented by a personal, social and health education package and tutorial system. There are few regular extra-curricular activities available. There have been some outside speakers and extended project opportunities provided.
- Students have mixed views about their experiences in the sixth form. Some speak highly about the fantastic teaching, excellent guidance and helpful advice they feel they are receiving. This contrasts starkly with more sobering feedback from other students of a lack of support, indifference to their specific needs and a disjointed and poor-quality learning experience, which is hampering their chances of success.
- The sixth form leader has taken various steps designed to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for students. To date, evidence of impact is limited. Nevertheless, a more rigorous approach to monitoring quality and standards has been instituted. Time will tell whether any of this will make a difference to students' success rates.
- Leaders have taken steps to better support students' transition from Year 11 to Year 12. It is hoped that this will prevent the mistakes of the past, where students received bad advice and were put on to unsuitable courses, effectively set up to fail, which they did.
- Students say they feel safe and agree that they have received help with their applications to university and college.
- The school appears to have absolved itself of responsibility for ensuring students are safe at their work placements and no quality assurance or checking mechanisms exist.

- Recruitment to the sixth form has declined since the last inspection and retention on courses has been variable over time.

## School details

Unique reference number	140976
Local authority	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Inspection number	10051997

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	29
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Gerard Garvey
Principal	Gareth Rowe
Telephone number	0191 2721111
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	10–11 May 2017

## Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school and has few girls. The number of pupils on roll at the school has risen since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for SEN and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. The remaining pupils originate from a diverse range of

minority ethnic heritages. Most pupils speak English as their first language.

- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school does not use alternative providers to educate any of its pupils.
- The school is sponsored by Newcastle College Group and describes itself as a specialist, industry-driven technical school for 13- to 19-year-olds, specialising in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects at GCSE and A Level.
- The school has submitted an application to expand the age range it teaches from 13 to 19 to 11 to 19.
- Since the previous section 5 inspection, a new principal and assistant vice-principal have been appointed.
- The school is not full and has received a number of pupils who have previously been excluded from other schools.

## Information about this inspection

- On 22 November, one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors conducted a serious weaknesses monitoring inspection. That inspection concluded that leaders and managers were taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.
- On 21 March 2018, Ofsted contacted the school’s principal to inform him that three of Her Majesty’s inspectors would be conducting a no-notice inspection under section 8 of the Education Act and would arrive within 15 minutes. The inspection was arranged due to concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, leadership and management (including governance) and the personal development, welfare and behaviour of pupils at the school. In addition, a number of complaints had raised wider concerns about the quality of education being provided. At the end of the first day on site, the Senior Her Majesty’s Inspector leading the inspection informed the principal and chair of the board of trustees that due to the seriousness of the emerging findings the section 8 inspection was being converted to a full section 5 inspection.
- Twenty-four lessons were visited, which allowed inspectors to see almost all staff teach, and included all the subjects the school offers, and enabled inspectors to see every year group. A number of these visits to lessons were with the principal. In addition, inspectors scrutinised work in pupils’ books and visited registration and tutor groups and the school’s isolation room.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, and the special educational needs coordinator, the staff responsible for safeguarding and representatives of the sponsor. Inspectors met formally with four groups of pupils and spoke to many others in lessons and at break and lunchtimes about their learning and progress. Inspectors also spoke to teachers, including NQTs, about their practice and pupils’ learning and progress.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school’s monitoring and evaluation records and a review of its performance, analyses of pupils’ progress, attendance records, behaviour incident logs and safeguarding procedures, and the minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors also took account of the 71 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View.

## Inspection team

John Young, lead inspector	Senior Her Majesty’s Inspector
Barry Found	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Darren Stewart	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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