

# Inspection of The Duchess's Community High School

Taylor Drive, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2DH

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Inspection dates: 19 and 20 October 2021

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Sixth-form provision

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Good

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils' learning across the curriculum varies from subject to subject. It also varies considerably within subjects. In subjects such as history, mathematics and physical education, many pupils acquire sound knowledge and skills. Such secure foundations are not in place in every subject. Assessment does not give teachers a clear picture of what pupils know and can do. Senior leaders are working with subject leaders to strengthen curriculum planning and assessment. This work is at an early stage of development.

Pupils can access a wide range of sports at lunchtime and after school. Teachers provide high-quality experiences in the visual and performing arts. For those pupils who take part, these experiences build confidence and cultural capital. However, not enough pupils benefit from the additional experiences which the school offers.

Many pupils concentrate well in lessons. They are keen to learn. Adults often build positive relationships. However, behaviour in lessons varies from classroom to classroom. Too often, pupils' learning is disrupted by low-level disruption. Leaders' expectations for pupils to be safe, ready and respectful are not consistently implemented by staff. Some pupils feel that swearing and boisterous behaviour go unchallenged.

Leaders have developed a strong student support team. They work very closely with pastoral staff to address pupils' needs. Staff take action when they have concerns over pupils' welfare. Despite this, some pupils still feel that their concerns are not heard. A significant minority of pupils lack confidence in how well adults address bullying. Leaders are improving curriculum plans and behaviour systems so that pupils are better supported.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

The quality of education that pupils experience is variable. Pupils do not learn well across the whole curriculum, particularly at key stage 3. Teachers do not consistently map out the important knowledge they want pupils to acquire. Leaders are working with teachers to improve curriculum planning.

Teachers do not identify pupils' misconceptions early enough. Teachers often set pupils complex tasks before checking that they have the knowledge to complete these well. Leaders are introducing new strategies to help pupils to remember more over time. There are areas where this is working well. Some teachers sequence learning effectively. However, this is not the case across the whole curriculum.

Leaders have made the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) a priority. They are also taking stronger action to improve the curriculum for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are improving the support and resources that pupils with SEND receive. Pupils feel support is helping them to

progress through the curriculum. However, some parents do not feel that their children get the right help. Leaders are taking more concerted action to improve attendance. This remains lower for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Leaders' actions to promote reading are at an early stage. There are programmes in place to help pupils with SEND read. However, weaker readers without an identified need do not get the help they need. Broader strategies to develop pupils' reading are underdeveloped.

Leaders have developed a personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Through this, pupils will learn about healthy relationships and the importance of respect. British values are taught within the curriculum. The police have visited school to talk about the dangers of hate crime. Despite this, many pupils told inspectors that a significant minority of their peers show a lack of respect for protected characteristics. The PSHE programme has not been implemented well enough.

Leaders are mindful that they have experienced more challenging behaviour in recent years. They are working with pastoral colleagues to help pupils to manage their behaviour. Leaders have revised expectations of behaviour. They are focusing on the importance of basic routines. Much inconsistency remains in the application of the behaviour policy. Too many staff do not address low-level disruption and unacceptable language. A sizable minority of parents remain concerned about behaviour.

The majority of pupils believe that teachers address known incidents of bullying or harassment. Records confirm leaders have taken action, often involving external partners. Despite this, a significant minority of pupils lack confidence in reporting concerns. For example, some pupils do not feel that sexist and homophobic language is addressed well.

Leaders consider the well-being of staff. The majority of staff feel well-supported in their work. Teachers in the early stages of their career appreciate the guidance they receive. Leaders are providing better training to build staff expertise.

Governors are improving how they hold leaders to account. They recently attended a strategy day to explore the effectiveness of improvement plans. They are receiving regular information about school performance. Governors work with the school improvement partner to check the school's progress. Despite this, they do not have a secure picture of the quality of education or pupils' behaviour.

Many students in the sixth form benefit from an ambitious curriculum. This provides many with the qualifications needed to take their next steps. Leaders have developed a PSHE programme to prepare students more widely for adult life. This programme is in its early stages, including careers information which does not currently meet the requirements of the Baker Clause. The Baker Clause requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical

education qualifications and apprenticeships. Leaders are mindful that the sixth-form curriculum does not currently cater for the needs of all potential students.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding team takes its responsibilities seriously. It works closely with pastoral staff to check that pupils are safe. Staff know what to do if they have concerns over for a child's welfare. Leaders pursue any concerns over pupils' safety with rigour and sensitivity. They meet safeguarding partners on a regular basis. Leaders carry out thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The quality of education is variable. Curriculum expectations are not high enough at key stage 3. Assessment does not always identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. On occasions, teachers ask pupils to complete complex tasks before they have acquired the necessary knowledge. Leaders should ensure that teachers build pupils' knowledge and understanding securely over time. Assessment should be used more effectively to check what pupils know and can do. Teachers should ensure that pupils understand concepts before moving on to new learning.
- New behaviour expectations are not being implemented well enough. On too many occasions, low-level disruption interrupts learning. Too often, teachers fail to address boisterous behaviour and unacceptable language. Leaders need to work with staff to ensure effective action is taken to improve behaviour. Leaders need to continue to develop stronger systems to listen to pupils and to respond to their concerns. They need to check the impact of actions to promote the importance of respectful relationships between all pupils and staff.
- Leaders have plans in place to enhance pupils' personal development. However, these plans are at an early stage of development across all phases, including in the sixth form. Gaps remain in pupils' understanding of aspects of equalities and careers. Leaders must take more intensive action to enhance the personal development of all pupils and to promote a more respectful climate across the school.
- Governors do not have an accurate view of aspects of the school's work. For example, they are not aware that many parents and pupils express concerns over behaviour. Governors need to work with leaders and improvement partners to develop stronger assurance systems. They need to improve their knowledge of school performance to provide leaders with better support and challenge.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	122362
<b>Local authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10200637
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,504
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	272
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Lesley Ilderton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alan Rogers and James Wilson (Co-headteachers)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.dchs-alnwick.org/">http://www.dchs-alnwick.org/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Two co-headteachers took up their posts in January 2021. The senior leadership team has been restructured.
- A new chair of the governing body was appointed in September 2021. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the membership of the governing body.
- The school provides alternative education provision for 13 pupils at the following providers: Engage (Alnwick and Berwick), Stars, Alnwick, and the Northumberland County Council EOTAS service.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors held several discussions with the co-headteachers and senior leaders. They also talked to a wide range of staff, including subject leaders and pastoral staff.
- Inspectors looked in detail into the curriculum in art, English, history, physical education and science. They talked to leaders and teachers about their curriculum plans. They also talked to pupils about what pupils knew and remembered in these subjects. They looked at pupils' work and visited lessons.
- Inspectors talked to members of the governing body to find out how they support and challenge school leaders.
- Inspectors talked to the school improvement partner and the senior school improvement partner from the local area.
- Inspectors checked safeguarding arrangements. They looked at the school's work to make staff and pupils aware of safeguarding issues. They also looked at safeguarding records to see how concerns over pupils' safety are recorded and followed up. They looked at the checks made on the suitability of staff working at the school.
- Inspectors visited pupils and staff based at one of the alternative education providers used by the school.
- Inspectors considered 420 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, 122 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 195 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including 140 free-text responses.
- Inspectors talked to a wide range of pupils to gather their views on school life.

## Inspection team

Malcolm Kirtley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Katherine Spurr	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gill Booth	Ofsted Inspector
Shelley Heseltine	Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Helman	Ofsted Inspector

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