

# Durham Sixth Form Centre

Monitoring visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	150012
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Karen Anderson, His Majesty's Inspector
<b>Inspection dates:</b>	27 and 28 November 2024
<b>Type of provider:</b>	16 to 19 academy converter
<b>Address:</b>	Providence Row The Sands Durham DH1 1SG

## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of education programmes for young people within the further education and skills sector. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Durham Sixth Form Centre is a well-established post-16 education provider. It became a 16 to 19 academy in November 2023. It provides 30 A levels, 17 applied general qualifications and a foundation diploma in art and design, alongside additional courses such as extended project qualification. At the time of the visit, there were around 1,700 students, all aged 16 to 19 years old. Fewer than five students had education health and care plans.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant education programmes that have a clearly defined purpose? Significant progress**

Leaders provide a highly ambitious curriculum, which includes a broad range of subjects and enrichment activities. They work with employers and universities to inform the curriculum and ensure that students develop the knowledge and skills that they need for their future careers. For example, teachers in science, technology and mathematics design the curriculum to reflect regional and national opportunities in sectors such as renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.

Leaders and managers use rigorous and thorough quality assurance procedures. These include annual in-depth evaluations of each subject area, frequent learning walks and insightful analysis of data. They use this information to plan professional development activities for staff which target specific improvements. For example, teachers in A-level history focused on their already high proportion of students achieving A\* to B grades and increased it further.

Leaders and managers recruit teachers who are experts, both in their subject and the craft of teaching. Teachers complete useful training based on the latest research into effective teaching. They also keep their subject knowledge up to date very well. For example, teachers on vocational courses complete 'externships', where they complete a placement working in their sector, such as in games development companies and legal teams in national organisations.

Leaders provide a wide-ranging careers programme for students. They employ a team of specialist careers advisers who provide expert guidance, which students value highly. Students also benefit from helpful information and events about higher education, apprenticeships and employment. They participate in useful tutorials which prepare them effectively for their next steps in education, training and employment.

Experienced governors and trustees bring a wealth of relevant experience to their roles. They are passionate about the centre and play a key role in working with leaders to reflect, review and strategically plan. Governors have thorough oversight through frequently speaking with students and staff, quality assuring key processes and monitoring the implementation of decisions that are made at board level.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality education programmes for young people that prepare them well for their intended job role, career aim and/or personal goals? Significant progress**

Teachers plan learning very effectively. They break complex topics into manageable components and ensure that students have a sound grasp of fundamental concepts before moving on. For example, teachers in history start by developing students' skills in writing descriptive paragraphs, before moving on to writing well-structured essays and honing their skills in analysis, comparison and critical thinking.

Teachers combine their passion for their subject with a range of highly effective teaching strategies. These include activities to help students recall prior learning and different techniques for checking students' understanding in lessons. Teachers embed opportunities throughout their courses to develop skills for future study and employment. For example, teachers in law develop students' oracy skills and build aptitude in professional speaking and listening that students need for a career in law.

Teachers accurately identify students' existing knowledge and skills at the start of their courses. They use this information to plan their curriculum carefully. For example, teachers in mathematics check and reinforce students' knowledge of key content from GCSE mathematics to ensure that students have a solid foundation on which to build knowledge and skills for their A-level course.

Teachers use well-planned and timely assessments to accurately evaluate students' progress and achievements. They use information from these assessments to provide feedback that enables students to improve their work. Students know specifically where they need to focus to improve their knowledge and skills. In addition, leaders and managers have clear oversight of the progress that students are making, enabling them to intervene if necessary.

Students benefit from frequent opportunities to encounter the world of work and higher education. This includes visits to workplaces and hearing from guest speakers

from specialist industries. For example, students in law and criminology were visited recently by a high court judge, and students in business went to a local university for a masterclass in entrepreneurship. Leaders are making significant progress in ensuring that students benefit from relevant work placements, particularly for those on vocational courses.

Students achieve very highly in their qualifications and make excellent progress from their starting points. Most students go on to study in higher education, with most of the remainder beginning higher-level apprenticeships with renowned organisations or moving into employment.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Significant progress**

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the centre. Students feel very safe and have high expectations of the behaviour of others. Teachers and staff complete valuable training on safeguarding and receive frequent updates, including on local risks. Students participate in useful tutorials on important topics such as knife crime, county lines and healthy relationships.

Experienced safeguarding staff respond to safeguarding issues swiftly and comprehensively. They engage professionally with external agencies, including Durham Constabulary, social services and mental health services. Leaders review safeguarding incidents and information frequently to reflect on their actions and identify themes, and adapt their tutorial curriculum and staff training accordingly.

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