



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

DURHAM JOHNSTON SCHOOL

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LEA: Durham

Inspection Number: 269313
Inspection Dates: 11-13 MAY 2004
Reporting Inspector: Linda Humphreys HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12(3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

This inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Durham Johnston School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was conducted by four of Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

Key to grades

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1 | Very good |
| 2 | Good |
| 3 | Adequate |
| 4 | Not adequate |

Description of the school

Durham Johnston School is a very large, split-site, 11-18 comprehensive school in Durham. Nearly all students are of white British heritage and come from a wide range of social and economic circumstances. A smaller proportion of pupils than average have special educational needs. When students enter the school, attainment is well above that typical for this age group. After age 16, just over half of students choose to continue their studies in the sixth form, and they are joined each year by some 30 to 40 students from other schools.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Effectiveness of the school

This is an effective school. Most students make good progress, and their personal development is good. High standards are achieved thanks to effective teaching and students' willingness to be attentive and work hard. Leadership and management are adequate, but the school has identified some crucial areas where improvements are required, in order to make a good school even better. The school provides good value for money.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

The sixth form is effective. Students achieve well and more than 90% of students go on to higher education. In general students achieve higher grades at A-level than might be anticipated from their prior attainment at GCSE. The curriculum offer is traditional: a good range of GCE AS- and A-level subjects is available, but only one Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE), which limits students' choices and restricts their ability to combine academic and vocational courses. There is no clear strategic plan for further developing provision, for example through the links being explored with other local institutions.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

Improvement has been good. Both key issues from the last inspection have been successfully addressed, but there is still no daily act of worship. High standards have been maintained, and standards achieved at age 14 and in the sixth form have improved. Good teaching has been maintained, although there is still room for improvement. The school has successfully introduced some innovations, such as collaboration with primary schools and an initial teacher training (ITT) programme.

Grade: 2

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation shows that senior staff understand where improvements are needed and there are some strong staff in positions of responsibility who can help to support development. The school has not set up ways to identify priorities for improvement and their planning for the school's development lacks focus and rigour. Nevertheless, the school has maintained and improved standards. It has also improved the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form, planned an improved curriculum for Years 10 and 11 from next September, and introduced other innovations. Overall, the school's capacity to improve is adequate.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

- evaluate and refine the work of the school in order to improve the areas where teaching is less effective

- improve the use of assessment information to check the effectiveness of the curriculum and to support individual students' progress
- develop the quality of strategic planning.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

Standards by age 14 are well above average, which represents very good progress in the light of the standards students achieved at age 11. Over the last five years, results at age 14 have improved faster than the national trend. Over the same period, GCSE results have improved at a similar rate to the national trend, but in 2003 GCSE results slipped below those obtained by students over the previous three years. Even so, these results indicate good progress from the standards these students achieved at age 14. The school's assessments show that students now in Year 11 are on course to do a little better this year. In the sixth form standards are well above average. Students make very good progress through Years 12 and 13, gaining much higher results than would be expected from their GCSE results at age 16.

Grade: 2

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school is correct in judging that students' personal development is good. Nearly all are keen to do well and work hard, and this is one of the main reasons why they make good progress. Indeed, students remain on task and show interest even when the teaching is less than stimulating. They do as they are told and are compliant. This creates a positive ethos for learning but means that students too rarely show enterprise or initiative in lessons. However, some capably organise extra-curricular activities with the minimum of guidance, including charity fund-raising, arts activities and an anti-war demonstration.

Behaviour is very good. The school believes that a small number of students present challenging behaviour; there is evidence that some teachers do not take risks in the activities they plan for lessons because of their perception that students will misbehave. There was no evidence of poor behaviour during the inspection which would support this view.

Students have a good understanding of what is right and wrong. They form very good relationships and respect other people's feelings. Relations between teachers and students are good but tend to be formal; one effect of this is that students are not always keen to contribute to discussion or to express their own views. A wide range of sporting activities promotes a healthy lifestyle. Opportunities are sometimes missed, for instance in assemblies, for students to reflect on the spiritual dimension in their lives.

Grade: 2

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The school's self-evaluation report judged teaching to be good, with strengths in teachers' knowledge of their subjects and planning. The good outcomes in examinations and in the personal development of students would substantiate this view. They are effectively prepared to do well in tests and examinations. Some teaching actively engages students and encourages them to think for themselves and contribute to discussion. Durham Johnston students are willing to learn and they appreciate the approaches which focus on learning and developing skills, in subjects such as, for example, English and history. There are indications in some students' work over the

past year, borne out by some lessons observed, that some teaching does not provide enough pace and challenge. Nevertheless, even where the tasks they are given are uninspiring, students are compliant and sustain their concentration. In the same way, the quality of assessment and marking is not consistently good and there are variations between subjects, so that students are not always given clear help about how they can improve.

The curriculum adequately meets the needs and interests of learners and is consistent with what most parents want. It promotes inclusion and includes a good range of enrichment opportunities. Most students aged 15 and 16 have traditionally studied 10 GCSEs. This has been appropriate for the more able but does not meet the needs of every learner. A small number of students have followed an alternative curriculum, with vocational experiences at the local college of further education, but this has still included eight GCSE courses. The curriculum planned for next year includes a wider choice of pathways, including significantly more applied GCSEs and extended vocational provision. There is a good range of A-level courses in the sixth form, along with Key Skills information technology and communication. Special arrangements have been made for a small number of sixth form students to follow a combination of courses in school and at the local FE College. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.

The school has effective systems to safeguard students' welfare. There is little evidence of bullying or racist incidents and any which occur are dealt with promptly. Effective support is provided for students with concerns, particularly through the peer support programme.

The progress of some students, for instance in Year 11, is monitored effectively because the pastoral system ensures that teachers know them well. Consequently, the school provides focused support for particular groups. However the school does not track rigorously enough how all students are progressing, and does not consistently set targets for individual students to aim for, except in the sixth form. Tutor time is not always used effectively. Also, working on two sites means that tutors are not always present for tutor time and this does not enable every tutor to form a close relationship with students. Good provision is made centrally for students with special educational needs (SEN) and supporting agencies are used well, but the provision that departments make for these students through their individual education plans is not consistently of the same good quality.

Although clear targets are set for pupils with special educational needs, many other pupils are not given the type of performance targets that help them to improve or to know where their strengths and weaknesses are. The school believes that careers guidance is a strong feature of the school. Guidance for most pupils about options and courses is satisfactory; however, some pupils do not feel they receive the guidance they need in choosing A-levels or selecting suitable courses beyond the school.

Grade: 3

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school accurately evaluates leadership and management as adequate. The leadership of the school is effective in enabling students to achieve high standards, particularly at age 14 and in the sixth form, and in providing a safe and purposeful learning environment.

Governors and senior managers have had the preoccupation of managing the school's ageing accommodation, and successive initiatives to unite the school on one site. This has diverted attention and energies from planning for other developments. Strategic planning does not articulate a clear sense of purpose for the future, and lacks the detail necessary to be a good support for development. Senior staff understand where improvements are needed. However, the school does not have rigorous self-evaluation procedures, which involve all staff in taking stock of the quality of the education on offer, which would enable staff to identify where improvement is needed, where good practice in some areas could be implemented in others, and where needs for professional development should be provided for. There has been steady improvement since the last inspection, and some successful innovations have been brought about, for example, the school's partnerships with primary schools and with higher education teacher training establishments. Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for reporting on its race equality policy are not met.

Staffing is good, although the number of support staff is low. Resources and accommodation are adequate. The school buildings provide adequate space but are in a poor state of repair and are not weather-proof. Few rooms provide a stimulating environment for learning - many are drab and uninspiring. The split site presents significant challenges in terms of travel, organisation, shared tutor groups and the inevitable duplication of some resources.

The school's income per student is below the national average, and the school provides good value for money.

Grade: 3

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