



Diss High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121184
LEA NORFOLK LEA
Inspection number 280949
Inspection dates 28 September 2005 to 29 September 2005
Reporting inspector Mr. Ian Seath LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Walcot Road
School category	Community		IP22 4DH
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01379642424
Number on roll	1140	Fax number	01379642428
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	.Rev A Billett
Date of previous inspection	1 November 1999	Headteacher	Mr. Stuart Ballantyne

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Diss High School is a comprehensive school for students aged 11-18. It has 1113 students, with 215 in the sixth form. Around 95 percent are from white British backgrounds and about 2.5 percent speak English as an additional language. Few students come from homes experiencing economic hardship and the number of students with special educational needs is low for a school of this size. The school is located in a rural area of south Norfolk.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Diss High School is a good school with many strong features. It meets the expectations of students and their parents. Most students attain high standards, but a few do not reach their full potential. Most sixth form students achieve good grades and go on to higher education or employment. The school has well-developed links with a range of external bodies and institutions which support the education and welfare of students. It gives good value for money. The school provides very good care for its students. They feel safe and enjoy their time at the school. Standards of behaviour are good, and students have respect for their peers. Teachers enjoy working with students. Most teaching is at least satisfactory, and much is good. However, the teaching in some lessons does not stimulate all students and is not always well-planned. The use of information and communications technology (ICT) to enrich students' experience is very limited. The school does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of ICT at Key Stage 4. Issues identified in the last inspection have been addressed, including literacy which is a central theme of the school's specialist status in humanities. The school is well-managed, with a satisfactory awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. Of the few areas of weakness, standards in ICT and aspects of quality assurance need to be improved. Weak performance in some areas, notably English, has been addressed and improvements are beginning to show. The overall performance of students improved significantly in 2005. Managers have demonstrated good capacity to improve. Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form Of the 215 students who attend the sixth form about one third transfer from other schools at the end of Year 11. Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that its sixth form is good. Students have a sense of identity and speak highly of the academic and pastoral support they receive. They are set challenging targets which they understand and work towards. Retention rates are high. The number of top grades (A/B) improved significantly in 2005 but students did not perform as well in ICT. Teaching develops students' social awareness and confidence, and a range of activities successfully prepares them for university. Students act as good role models for the rest of the school. Leadership and management are effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school meets the requirements of the National Curriculum for ICT at Key Stage 4.
- Ensure that standards of teaching are continually raised through effective monitoring, target setting and review.
- Improve lesson planning with an emphasis on what it is that students are expected to learn.
- Continue to raise standards in English .
- Ensure that good practice is shared between curriculum areas to drive up standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall standards are good. Progress in mathematics is outstanding. However, in some subjects students make, at best, satisfactory progress. When students enter the school in Year 7 their standards are around the national average. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in the proportion of students who enter the school below this level. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3, especially in mathematics and science. In English, their progress has been weak, but improved significantly in 2005. At the end of Key Stage 4 a high proportion of students gain five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C. Results for GCSE mathematics in 2005 were very good. Following the introduction of a series of measures to improve GCSE English language, pass rates increased markedly in 2005. Most students, including those with low prior attainment, make good progress. The progress of students with special educational needs is in line with those of their peers. Girls make slightly better progress than boys. In the sixth form, results for 'A' level courses have been variable in recent years. In 2004, the proportion of students who achieved high grades was below the national average in a number of courses. In 2005 this improved significantly and is now well above the national average. Some subjects remain weak, notably ICT and psychology. A high proportion of students who start 'A' levels complete them. Progress of students on 'A' level courses improved in 2005 to above that expected.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agreed with the school that the overall personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students enjoy lessons and the opportunities the school provides. As a result, they attend and behave very well. They have good opportunities to develop knowledge of other cultures and beliefs, for example through trips abroad, during assemblies, and citizenship and religious studies lessons. The school has an orderly and calm atmosphere. Students contribute well to school life through, for instance, taking part in the school council or helping younger students with their reading. Students participate well in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. School meals offer a range of healthier options, and students like the quality of the food. The message that bullying is not tolerated is displayed well around the school. A positive, friendly atmosphere is shown in all aspects of the school's work and the few instances of bullying are taken seriously. Students are happy with the diligent way the school deals with this issue. They are prepared well to make a positive contribution in the community. The school provides well-organised work experience for Year 10 students, as well as effective careers guidance. However, more needs to be done to develop students' ICT skills in preparation for the workplace or further study.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors broadly agreed with the school that teaching and learning are good. However, the school is slightly overgenerous in the evaluation of its own teaching. In the best classes, teachers challenge students through interesting activities and helpful feedback, indicating clearly what they need to do to improve. For example, in one mathematics session a brisk pace and variety of tasks, together with good use of resources and the effective checking of learning, ensured that students both learned well and enjoyed the lesson. The planning of lessons is particularly good in English where there has been a significant improvement in standards recently. Some lesson planning in other subjects is not as effective because it gives too little attention to the needs of individual students and to what students are expected to learn. The school knows it needs to improve teaching in some subjects and has a range of initiatives to achieve this. It can do more to ensure that the approaches to teaching and learning used by the best subjects are fully utilised by all teachers. The school works hard to recognise the commitment of its teachers. Their good subject knowledge helps students to achieve high standards. The teachers maintain good relationships with students and this has a positive impact on students' motivation, self-confidence and progress. Teachers and students are well supported by teaching assistants.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

At the time of the last inspection, the school did not provide well for religious education and for all students with reading and writing difficulties. A focus on literacy is at the heart of the school's new specialist status and there is now good provision in Key Stage 3 for students with emotional, behavioural or learning needs, including 'catch-up' classes. Citizenship has been introduced as a new subject in Key Stages 3 and 4. In Years 9, 10 and 11 this is linked with religious education and personal, social and health education in a course which is an innovative response to the weaknesses previously identified. A distinctive feature of the Key Stage 3 curriculum is the opportunity for students to study a second modern foreign language and classical studies. The Key Stage 4 curriculum enables students to broaden their studies school and includes vocational elements, some of which are taught at a local further education college. The two-week work placement in Year 10 helps students to understand the demands of the world of work. The sixth form curriculum successfully meets students' needs through the provision of a broad range of courses, including those which attract a relatively small number of students. Throughout their time at the school, students benefit from a varied programme of extra-curricular activities. In the sixth form, an excellent programme of extension activities enables students, amongst other things, to learn a new foreign language and support the reading of younger students in the school. Inspectors did not agree with the school's evaluation that the curriculum is

outstanding. Students taking a second language in Year 9 do not have an opportunity to follow the National Curriculum in ICT and there is no course in ICT for students in Years 10 and 11. This means that the school is not meeting the statutory requirements for ICT.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff give a high priority to supporting students' personal and emotional needs. Year 7 students are given effective support for the transition from primary school. All requirements for child protection are in place, and the school meets its statutory requirements. There is an ongoing programme to train staff in child protection issues. The small but steady numbers of students placed with foster families achieve well. School and families work well in partnership. Students appreciate the care and kindness they receive from staff. They told inspectors that they are looked after very well, and inspectors agreed. Students in Year 7 who need help with reading benefit from paired reading sessions with Year 11 and sixth form students. The school provides a number of ways in which students can get help with school or personal problems, including trained pupil mentors, volunteer mentors from the local community and a popular school counsellor.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school evaluated its leadership and management as good. The evidence from this inspection supported this view and identified significant strengths in leadership. The headteacher leads the school well. His clear vision is communicated effectively to staff and contributes significantly to the sense of order and purpose that is apparent in everything the school does. Managers share his commitment and help to promote an ethos in which all students are valued, in which they can achieve well, and in which standards are raised. Effective day-to-day management ensures that the school operates calmly and efficiently. Managers have responded quickly to make improvements where they are needed. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been addressed. Quality assurance procedures are well established but are not always as effective as they might be. The good practice identified in much of the teaching is not used to improve areas where teaching is satisfactory. In order to raise standards further, the school needs to set targets which are more challenging, and to identify through its departmental planning procedures how these targets are to be met. Governors understand the strengths of the school well. They are proud of the standards it achieves and its concern for students' care. They want to build on these strengths to improve still further the school's performance and see the school's successful application for specialist status as a good way to achieve this. The school's financial management is secure and budgets are tightly controlled. The school is very well regarded by parents and students. Teachers are well-qualified and experienced. Accommodation is satisfactory and most resources are used well, although the school acknowledges in its self-evaluation that it is not yet using its new ICT resources as effectively as it

might. This good school has the scope to become an outstanding one. It has a successful track record of improvement and the further changes that would be required are within its capacity to achieve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Earlier this week a small team of inspectors visited your school. We met and talked to many of you and sat in on many of your lessons. We also met with teachers, and had many letters and a few phonecalls from parents. We were able to learn about aspects of your school, from those of you who have just joined in Year 7 through to those in the sixth form. Throughout this process, you were helpful, polite, and courteous. We would like to thank you for that. Your school is a good one, and you have a right to be proud of it - as many of you are. It has many strengths, and one of them is you. Your behaviour is exemplary, both around the school and in class, where it enables you to learn effectively. When we met in groups, you talked highly of the support which the school offers and the care it provides in order that you can learn well. Your school is well-managed, and it has shown that it can improve significantly - particularly in the last year when exam results were much better than the year before. Your teachers teach you well, and there are some very good lessons. One of the ways that your school can improve further is to make sure that those features that make the best classes successful are shared between all teachers. Your school also needs to make sure that you are all able to use and benefit from computers and ICT, both during class and private study. The inspectors felt that the school is capable of improving further to become an outstanding one, and is already showing progress towards this. You can support this process by making sure that you ask for help if you need it, by continuing to treat those around you with respect, and by working hard at your studies. You mentioned to us that the amount of bullying is very low - you can keep it low by talking to teachers if you are affected.