



The Duston School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122074
LEA Northamptonshire
Inspection number 284000
Inspection dates 18 January 2006 to 19 January 2006
Reporting inspector Christopher Redman AI HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Berrywood Road
School category	Community		Northampton
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Northamptonshire NN5 6XA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01604 460004
Number on roll	1171	Fax number	01604 454005
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms Daniele Hill
Date of previous inspection	15 September 2003	Headteacher	Mrs Jane Herriman

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 19	18 January 2006 - 19 January 2006	284000

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Introduction

When Duston School was inspected in September 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools subsequently visited the school on six occasions to monitor its progress. As part of the reorganisation of education in Northampton in September 2004, the school was renamed 'The Duston School' and extended its age range to include pupils aged 11 and 12. The school was inspected by five Additional Inspectors in January 2006.

Description of the school

The Duston School serves a largely suburban, economically and socially mixed community. Its 1171 pupils include 129 in the sixth form. Whilst most of the pupils are White British, about 1 in 7 represents a wide variety of other heritages nearly all of whom speak English fluently. A quarter of the pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties, higher than is typical nationally. The proportion of pupils having a statement of special educational need is in line with the national average. There is designated special provision for a small group of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders who travel from as far as Leicester.

The school is currently accommodated in two buildings about half a mile apart separated by playing fields. Work has started on building a new school on the current site.

Since the inspection of September 2003, there have been two changes of headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Nevertheless, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the standards achieved by the pupils, their attendance, the effectiveness of middle management, and the quality of teaching.

The school has improved its overall effectiveness considerably since its last inspection but it remains inadequate. The school agrees with this judgement.

The September 2003 inspection required the school to address issues concerned with: management; the quality of teaching; the curriculum; the pupils' attitudes to learning and the standards they achieved; and compliance with the statutory provision of a daily act of collective worship. The school struggled to make adequate progress in these areas until September 2005. Under the highly effective leadership of new senior managers many aspects of the school's work have been improved, showing that the school has good capacity to improve further. Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are much better as a result of improved teaching and greater care and guidance. Attendance, however, is significantly below the national average. Statutory health and safety checks are not in place but pupils feel secure at school. The curriculum is now satisfactory and pupils partake in a daily act of collective worship. Teaching is not yet good enough, partly due to weaknesses in middle management, and standards have yet to rise adequately particularly in English. Because of the remaining weaknesses the school does not yet provide value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form has improved and now offers satisfactory provision. Standards in the sixth form are below average but progress in lessons has improved recently and is now satisfactory. Students benefit from a good programme of personal development which gives them responsibilities and prepares them well for the future. Teaching is satisfactory and students feel well supported. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

Raise the standards pupils achieve, particularly in English. Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently of a high standard so that pupils are fully involved in lessons, enjoy their work, and improve their rate of progress. Improve the attendance rates of pupils. Ensure that all middle managers make an effective contribution to raising standards across the school. Comply with government health and safety regulations.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards have improved recently but are not yet good enough. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are below average. Poor standards of literacy, on entry in particular, are not being tackled sufficiently rigorously. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 standards remain below average in English, mathematics and science and pupils do not make the progress they should, particularly in English. In the 2005 national tests results fell but recently progress has been much better and standards are starting to rise.

By the end of Year 11 results in GCSE examinations are below the national average. Last year the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C grades declined and significant numbers of pupils underachieved. The percentage achieving a higher grade pass in English, mathematics and science was below average and achievement in English in particular was not good enough. Currently standards are improving but there is legacy of underachievement that has yet to be fully addressed.

There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls or those from different ethnic heritages. Throughout Years 7 to 11 pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities also underachieve, although their progress is improving particularly as assessment data is being used more effectively to target support.

Attainment by the end of the sixth form is below average and A level results have declined since 2003. Students' performance in the sciences and physical education are good but not in English and history. Girls have done much better than boys. Students' performance is better than average on vocational courses at Levels 2 and 3. Recently progress has increased markedly and is now satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The development of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is satisfactory. Spiritual development is improving and pupils are starting to develop a greater respect for each other. However, there are missed opportunities in lessons to develop pupil's appreciation of the world around them. Moral development is strong and pupils have a well developed sense of fairness and express strong opinions about injustices. The implementation of a new learning and behaviour policy has successfully increased pupils' responsibility for their learning and provided more opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community. There are also many good opportunities for pupils to work together, which have improved skills of co-operation and collaboration. Relationships are often good. Pupils are beginning to develop more confidence in their own academic abilities.

Behaviour has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. There is still some boisterous behaviour but this is mainly outside lessons. Pupils state that well behaved pupils now are recognised and get a fairer proportion of the teacher's attention. Their

attitudes during lessons are satisfactory and are closely related to the quality of teaching. Several pupils commented that they are starting to enjoy learning and recently feel they are making better progress. Nevertheless, attendance is unsatisfactory and erratic attendance continues to have an adverse effect on pupil's achievement. Exclusions are still too high but the number is declining markedly. The school has developed good procedures to reintegrate pupils after exclusion.

Pupils are well informed about healthy lifestyles and many are beginning to respond positively to these important messages. Learners feel safe in school, a significant improvement achieved since September 2005. However, weaknesses in learning, particularly English, have limited the extent to which pupils develop skills contributing to their future economic well being.

Good opportunities for personal development are a strength of the sixth form. Students are enjoying taking on more responsibilities in the school, such as mentoring Year 9 students, accompanying teachers on break and lunch time duties and helping with the exciting display work seen around the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning has improved significantly, but there is still too much that is unsatisfactory and not enough that is good or outstanding. Consequently, the quality of teaching remains inadequate, including for pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils themselves commented that the climate for learning is now much more purposeful in most lessons. In particular, there is greater consistency in the way behaviour is managed. As a result, pupils feel more confident in their learning.

The most effective teaching successfully inspires and engages pupils in their learning, creating a trusting atmosphere in which pupils are able to succeed. Praise is used constructively to encourage pupils but also challenge them to achieve more highly. Most teachers use targets well to motivate and inform the pupils how well they are getting on.

The school has worked hard to adopt a common approach to lesson planning and managing teaching. This has had a positive impact on pupils' learning. However, inconsistent practice remains. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, learning often lacks pace and energy and pupils are not sufficiently involved, sometimes leading to distracting behaviour. Marking and assessment have improved but are not consistently used effectively to raise standards and as a result a few pupils are unsure what they need to do to improve.

Teaching of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders is satisfactory and there is satisfactory provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory and students feel well supported.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 pupils follow the full National Curriculum. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is broadly satisfactory but does not always adequately prepare pupils with differing interests and abilities for the world of work. The sixth form curriculum is predominantly academic but there are suitable plans to widen the range of courses to suit all students' interests and abilities and the needs of the local community.

A wide range of well attended extracurricular activities are offered. These activities enrich the pupils' experience and contribute well to their enjoyment and achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Good induction procedures ensure that pupils settle quickly into Year 7. Pupils of all ages find most staff helpful and approachable. Child protection procedures have improved substantially and are now of good quality. There are improved procedures to ensure that vulnerable pupils are identified and supported. Although a good start has been made to secure much needed improvements to health and safety, the current arrangements do not satisfy government requirements because regular health and safety checks are not being made with the company responsible for the school site while the new school is being built.

Alterations to the pastoral system have brought about improved monitoring of behaviour and attendance. However, the link between academic achievement and pastoral care, although developing, is not strong enough. Parents are still concerned about the quality of education offered by the school and a substantial number feel that their concerns are not appropriately responded to through the pastoral system.

Generally, pupils receive appropriate careers advice. Sixth form students are given good guidance in choosing courses, careers and higher education options. They feel well supported by the recent introduction of an academic review to guide their learning. Sixth formers say they are now beginning to feel proud of their school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management has improved radically since September 2005 and is now satisfactory, including the management of the sixth form. The new headteacher's outstanding leadership has raised the expectations of the whole school community. She has brought coherence to the work of all managers and led significant improvements in teaching, learning, behaviour and care. She is very well supported by the senior leadership team. Some middle management is very good but too much is not effectively improving the school's provision quickly enough, including the work

of heads of year and some subject leaders. Consequently, overall middle management is inadequate. Training and careful recruitment have considerably strengthened the professional expertise available but weaknesses in teaching remain, particularly in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and information and communication technology. Monitoring by senior managers of teaching and learning is thorough, well organised and contributes to good self-evaluation. Where weaknesses are identified they are tackled tenaciously by senior managers and with growing confidence by middle managers. The recent improvements secured by the school demonstrate it now has good capacity to make further gains.

A significant minority of the parents who completed their questionnaire expressed concerns about behaviour, teaching, learning and the quality of care for their children. Inspectors agree with these long standing concerns but identified the considerable progress that has been made recently, a fact recognised by several parents. The extent of the improvements secured by the school in the past four months has not been communicated effectively enough to parents.

Governance has improved recently and now is good. Governors have worked successfully to secure appropriate leadership for the school and monitor progress suitably. Past financial management was weak but recently it has improved significantly. The governors have agreed with the local authority suitable plans to reduce the large budget deficit.

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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?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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	Yes

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

You may remember that a team of inspectors visited your school recently to find out how good it was and how well you are doing. Thank you for being so friendly and telling us about your work and what you think of the school. I am writing to let you know our judgements.

As I have inspected your school several times before over the past two years I know that it has struggled to provide you with an adequate education. However, since September 2005 things have improved considerably. You told us that behaviour is much better and we agree. Lessons are not often disrupted which has allowed you to learn more effectively. The introduction of consistency management and cooperative discipline has involved you more actively in lessons and is helping you to develop a sense of responsibility for your learning and behaviour. Some of you are starting to really enjoy learning both in lessons and in the additional activities and clubs you join. Several of you told us that you are becoming proud of your school. You told us that you are fortunate to have such a good headteacher as Mrs Herriman and we agree. She has worked hard with your teachers to ensure improvements happen quickly.

We agree with your teachers that your school can be even better. The standard of your work is not as good as it should be, particularly in English, and we have asked your teachers to make further improvements so that you can learn more quickly. You can play your part by improving your attendance, which is unsatisfactory at present. We have asked that appropriate health and safety checks are made to comply with government regulations. This is particularly important while your new school is being built.

Because your school has improved quickly recently it no longer requires special measures. However, it is still not good enough so we will come back in about a year to reinspect the school.

We enjoyed our two days with you. If you work hard and pay attention to your teachers you will play an important part in making your school even better than it is now.