



Darton High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106651
Local Authority Barnsley
Inspection number 287576
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Bill Keast

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Churchfield Lane
School category	Community		Darton, Barnsley
Age range of pupils	11–16		South Yorkshire S75 5EW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01226 382568
Number on roll (school)	1145	Fax number	01226 382350
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr J Sanderson
		Headteacher	Mr Simon Hill
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	1–2 November 2006	287576

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average sized school draws its students from an area with pockets of deprivation. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and statements of special educational need is average. Few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few are at an early stage of learning English. The school is a specialist humanities college. The headteacher took up his post at Easter 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education and gives sound value for money.

The headteacher took up his post at Easter following two terms as acting head. His rigorous self-evaluation identified the need to raise standards, particularly at the end of Year 9 where they were below average and had been declining for three years. A range of strategies and changes in staffing structure were put in place to achieve this. Standards rose significantly and are now average. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average reflecting the standards these students had reached at the end of Year 9. All groups of students are making steady progress and their achievement is satisfactory.

Actions have been taken to improve the effectiveness of teaching in raising students' achievement. The quality of teaching, while satisfactory, is too variable because teachers are not yet consistent in their planning of work to meet each student's need or using methods that involve students in their learning. The curriculum has changed little in recent years and, while meeting national requirements, does not meet the needs of all students equally well. Few courses lead to accreditation other than GCSE and the provision for vocational education in Years 10 and 11 is underdeveloped.

Students are well cared for and procedures for their safeguarding meet current government requirements. The school works well with external agencies to promote students' well-being. Students' personal development is satisfactory. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and they make a good contribution both to the school community and the wider community. The student council is becoming a very influential body. Clear procedures for managing students' behaviour have been put in place but some teachers are using them too readily so that students reach the sanction of fixed term exclusion too rapidly. Behaviour is satisfactory. Students feel safe and say that reported incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.

Overall leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher provides effective and incisive leadership. The senior leadership team has been restructured and additional members appointed. The capability of middle leaders is developing rapidly. Honest and accurate self-evaluation has led to many initiatives being taken and new systems put in place. Improvement in the issues identified in the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The impact of the specialist school status has been restricted by the effect of the change in headship but with a recent appointment is moving forward again. The effectiveness of some of the recent actions is already clear but many, while clearly showing signs they are leading to improvement, have not had sufficient time for their impact to be fully evident. Nevertheless, there has been sufficient impact to show that with the current leadership the capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all students through wider provision of vocational courses.
- Improve the quality of teaching by consistently providing work that meets each student's needs and uses methods which encourage students to be involved in their learning.
- Reduce fixed term exclusions and the incidences of 'isolation' by ensuring teachers use the support systems consistently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards on entry are average. Standards at the end of Year 9 had been declining for three years from 2003 with significant underachievement by 2005. Prompt and effective action by the incoming headteacher led to significant improvement in 2006 so that standards are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Year 11 have been average but fell in 2006 reflecting the lower standards of these students at the end of Year 9. Although students made satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, the school did not meet its challenging targets. Standards are broadly average although those in Year 11 remain below average. Students' achievement is satisfactory. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups within a year group.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students respond well to good teaching that interests and actively involves them in their learning and they enjoy their lessons. However, this is not always the case and their concentration and enjoyment wane when teachers talk too much. Students generally conduct themselves well around the building showing a satisfactory awareness of safety issues. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles with many taking part in extra sporting activities. The strength of the students' contribution to their community is the outcome of the specialist school status where it is one of the aims. Students are developing the skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being satisfactorily. School councillors are gaining a real understanding of democracy. The developing citizenship programme is beginning to raise students' understanding and there are good plans to introduce enterprise skills across the curriculum.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Where teaching is good, lessons have rapid pace, teachers give clear instruction, ask questions which encourage students to think, and use a range of teaching methods which challenge all students to learn quickly. In these lessons students are well motivated and make good progress. Too often one or more of these strengths are missing and lessons become mundane and routine. Students become distracted and quickly lose the excitement of learning. Progress then slows and achievement is limited. Lesson planning is inconsistent, often lacking detail and not identifying tasks that are matched to the needs of all the learners. The school tracks the progress of its students on a regular basis but the use of this assessment at subject level is inconsistent. The marking of students' work, for example, varies from the detailed comment that includes accurate advice on how improvements may be made to the cursory sequence of ticks with little comment on the quality of the work completed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school covers all that it should with a satisfactory range of enrichment activities that gives a good emphasis on study support in Years 10 and 11. The evaluation of impact of the current curriculum on students' achievement has lacked rigour and is a barrier to the increasing emphasis on personalised learning. A personal development course is an effective provision for a small group of lower attaining and vulnerable students. Provision for information and communication technology is satisfactory but, as yet, insufficient use is made of the new equipment to enhance the quality of students' learning within other subjects. While specialist school status has had limited impact to date it is clearly an integral part of the curriculum and is leading to a developing involvement with other organisations and partners. This, in turn, is promoting the development of enterprise provision through, for example, links with the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection procedures are well established. Good links with primary schools and an effective 'Buddy' system help new students settle in quickly and are particularly helpful for vulnerable students. Students who join the school part way through a year say that they are welcomed and soon make friends. Relationships are good and students say they feel able to go to adults if necessary. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Some good support for individuals and good use of individual education plans was observed in lessons. The support that enables students to maximise their achievement is satisfactory. Its effectiveness is limited by the weakness in some aspects of the curriculum students are offered and

the variation in impact of systems to ensure students are ready to learn. Careers education and guidance is satisfactory. Academic guidance is satisfactory. While information from assessments is used effectively to identify groups who need additional support, it is not yet sufficiently detailed to promote individual progress as effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

On taking charge the new headteacher instigated a re-evaluation of the priorities of the school and followed this up with targeted actions. For example, the previous underachievement by the end of Year 9 was identified and decisive action taken. As a consequence national test results improved significantly. New appointments have been made in key areas to broaden and strengthen the quality of leadership. External consultants have been deployed in conjunction with a good variety of staff training. As a result of these actions the quality of leadership is being systematically improved at all levels. Consistent and meaningful evaluation is now taking place at all levels across the school. The new systems and structures are starting to change the quality of provision, but are still in the early stages of implementation. Governors have been too complacent about the previous performance of the school. They are now more knowledgeable about its strengths and weaknesses and fully involved in decisions about the strategic direction of the school. The school gained specialist status in 2005. The current headteacher had, as deputy, been responsible for the promotion of this initiative. The change in his responsibilities and the vacancy at a senior level while the headship position was resolved restricted the energy devoted to this initiative. As a result, although links with the community have been significantly strengthened and some changes made in the curriculum, the initiative has yet to have the expected impact on attainment.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and for your contribution to the inspection. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing you at work.

We found that your school is giving you a satisfactory education. Standards are broadly average and your achievement is satisfactory, although that has not previously been the case in Years 7 to 9. Your new headteacher has very quickly identified what needs to be done to make yours a good school and, together with your teachers, has taken many actions to achieve this. Your school is on the move. However, while these changes work through, there is too much variation in the way you and your teachers are responding. You told us you feel safe at school and we found that you are well cared for. You told us you felt able to seek help if necessary. You settle in quickly and well. You make a particularly good contribution to your school community and to the wider community. The developing citizenship program is helping you to understand your rights and your responsibilities. Your behaviour is satisfactory and your conduct around school is good. However, each year group has a group whose poor behaviour affects others' learning and too many of you are excluded for a fixed period or go into isolation. This is also partly because your teachers are not yet consistent in their use of the systems. Teaching is satisfactory. Although you have good teaching that you enjoy because the work is interesting, at the right level and you are involved in your learning, this is not always the case. Your curriculum covers all that it should but it does not meet everybody's needs equally well.

To help you raise your achievement we have asked that the school ensures that the curriculum meets all students' needs so everyone has appropriate courses to follow. We have asked that the quality of teaching is improved through greater consistency in planning work at the right level and involving you in your learning. That means you will need to explain your answers and be willing to cooperate. Finally, you need to work with your teachers so that you are ready to learn and reduce the times you are out of lessons.

We wish you and your school well for the future.