

# The Duchess's Community High School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122362
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	301959
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Hancock, HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1155
6th form	302
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Ian Walker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Maurice Hall
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2003
<b>School address</b>	Howling Lane Alnwick Northumberland NE66 1DH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01665 602166
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The Duchess's Community High School is a specialist Technology and Music (with English) College located on two sites in the centre of a rural market town. Provision is extended beyond the school day and includes large community, adult and youth programmes. More than one quarter of students are in the sixth form. The school has many achievement awards such as the Healthy Schools award. The intake reflects the full range of social and economic backgrounds. There are fewer students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than normally found. Nearly all the students use English as their first language and attendance is above average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

The Duchess's High School and specialist college is a good and improving school with outstanding features. Students make good progress in their studies, and the care, guidance and support they receive is excellent. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses very well and is working effectively to make further improvements. For example, English is not doing as well as mathematics and science, particularly at Key Stage 3, and the school has made this a high priority. Students thoroughly enjoy learning, feel safe, and behave well. Results have improved and are above average. The number of students gaining higher GCSE grades has increased since the last report.

The school has significantly improved the curriculum. It is excellent and the provision of highly relevant vocational courses is a particular feature. Teaching and learning is good overall. The school knows there is not enough high quality teaching to consistently challenge students all of the time and is taking action. Specialist college targets have been met and significantly exceeded in technology. It is too early to see if targets are being met in music and English as they are recently designated specialist college subjects.

Personal development is excellent and the school has other strengths such as the partnerships with parents and links with other schools. There are many examples of students making very strong contributions to the community, for example through music, drama, and vocational course activities.

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers are steering the school well and capacity to improve is very good. The governing body monitors the school's performance and makes sure it continues to move forward. Resources are effectively deployed to achieve good value for money. Parents, staff, and students are highly concerned about the accommodation and say many aspects are no longer fit for purpose.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The sixth form provides the students with a good quality of education and gives good value for money. Students know they get a good deal and are full of praise for the way that the school helps them to do well. The sixth form is well led and managed with infectious enthusiasm. Results at A-level, AS-level and on vocational courses are good because the teaching and learning is consistently good. Most students successfully complete the two years to A-level and results are above average. Art, geography and food technology have consistently gained high results since the last report.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school very successfully challenges students to take much of the responsibility for their own learning and personal development. This aspect of its work is securely underpinned by frequent and varied checks to ensure that students are doing as well as they should in all aspects of their life in the sixth form. Success is evident because results are good and students are mature and confident. They know clearly how they are getting on and what they need to do to improve. Students recognise the good quality of support they receive when moving from the requirements of GCSE to more challenging courses. They talk about the quality of feedback from subject teachers as being very good.

The curriculum is outstanding because, in addition to the large number of advanced level courses, the school provides a large range of highly valuable extra courses and qualifications

in, for example, first aid, health and safety and languages. The courses are designed to meet the needs and interests of all learners and students speak highly of the community service provision which helps them to help others and gain in confidence. External links with the community, universities and employers are very good and help students to make properly informed choices for the future.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the proportion of good and better teaching and learning.
- Improve achievement in English at Key Stage 3 to match performance in mathematics and science.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Standards are above average throughout the school and all groups of students make good progress. Challenging examination targets are met. Boys and girls join in Year 9 with broadly average attainment which rises to above average by the time they take the national tests at the end of the year. Results have risen steadily over the last four years. Test results in 2006 were above average overall with mathematics and science being stronger than English. The picture was similar in 2007. The school is working closely with partner schools and the local authority to improve results in English at Key Stage 3.

Students do well at GCSE where results are above average compared to the country as a whole. The specialist school provision, particularly in the technology area, has been instrumental in supporting the rising performance trend. GCSE results were above average in 2006 and represented good achievement from students' entry to the school in Year 9. The 2007 results were similar in terms of the year group's overall performance. Results in mathematics and science were above average, and average in English.

Attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is broadly average for the courses on offer. A-level results in 2006 and 2007 were above average in terms of pass grades A to E. More than half of all subject entries resulted in grades A and B which is well above average. Results in AS courses and vocational subjects were average. Overall this represents good achievement.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Citizenship education is particularly well developed, and displays of work show a sensitive awareness of others' ideas and cultures. Attendance has improved. It is now above average and the number of exclusions has been significantly reduced.

Students feel safe in school and are confident that they can turn to an adult for help if necessary. Behaviour in lessons and around school is very good. Students understand the system the school uses called 'Ladder of Consequences', and feel that problems are dealt with swiftly and firmly. Students have an excellent understanding of the benefits of eating sensibly, keeping fit and being healthy. The school has a long track record of encouraging a healthy lifestyle and was the first in the local authority to gain the Healthy Schools Award. A good example is the

innovative 'Pop In' facility which is fully appreciated and well used by students. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular sport and performance activities.

School and year councils provide important opportunities for students to express opinions and understand how moral, social and financial considerations affect decisions. The councils have been instrumental in bringing about improvements in school and are currently working on a 'Sponsor a Slab' scheme to improve the school environment. Students also raise money for other good causes, both at home and abroad, and are aware of global perspectives, with a notable link with Trinidad. There is an excellent sixth form community service programme.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. There is not enough high quality teaching to consistently challenge students all of the time. The school knows this and is working well to make improvements. In lessons where teachers give students too little opportunity to contribute, progress is slower and students not as well motivated. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and students work in an atmosphere of mutual respect. A parent captured a typical view when writing 'there are excellent teachers who know how to inspire but some of the teaching does not encourage or fan students' passion for the subject as well'.

Systems for assessing progress are good. Students know how well they are doing, and what they need to do to reach the target grades they set themselves in negotiation with teachers. Work is regularly marked and feedback on how to improve is sharply focused. There are effective strategies in place for students who need additional support and they make good progress.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The curriculum in the main school is excellent. It is broad, balanced and makes sure all needs are met. Regular audits of the students' views, and those of parents, help staff to rigorously monitor provision and provide appropriate programmes.

In addition to a broad range of academic courses, there is a fine range of vocational courses. They are accredited with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and many are in partnership with work based providers, for example equine studies with a local equestrian centre, and horticulture with Alnwick Castle gardens. Other Year 10 students follow a Young Apprenticeship course and spend up to nearly half their time in a business environment.

There is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, for example musical groups, sports activities and drama. Standards are high and students have performed in the Sage Concert Hall in Gateshead, the Royal Albert Hall in London and in Canada.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

#### Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is outstanding. A particularly strong feature is the high level of sensitive care shown by staff with a clear understanding of students' needs so that they benefit from a well-integrated network of personal and academic support.

Many parents commented on the highly effective induction programme when students start at the school. Excellent links with partner middle schools result in students' strengths and needs being identified very quickly and ensure a smooth transition. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of this. Child protection procedures are clearly set out and understood by staff, and arrangements for safeguarding students are well established.

Systems for tracking students' progress are very effective and parents refer to the high quality communication with home as always prompt and excellent. Students understand their targets and the advice they receive about curriculum choices and future educational and career opportunities has vastly improved since the last report.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong and effective direction with a sharp focus on raising standards. His vision is shared by leaders at all levels. Governors are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and provide good support.

The school knows itself very well and has good procedures in place for checking the quality of its work. The school uses all the resources it has for the benefit of students and value for money is good, largely because achievement, standards, teaching, learning, leadership and management are good. Subject and pastoral leaders have good knowledge about what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. They have the ability to target support effectively so that improvement follows. A particularly successful example is the enthusiastic leadership of teaching and learning where a wide range of strategies, such as coaching and research, ensure all teaching continues to improve. Where there have been small pockets of underachievement, these have been tackled well to ensure all learners make good progress. Support staff are highly effective and play a significant part in moving the school forward.

The school listens carefully to the views of parents and students. As a result, parents' support for the school is strong and they feel that their children enjoy learning and make good progress. Links with the local community are well established and have a positive impact on the quality of education. The school does all it can to make sure students are as safe as they can be in a school with two sites in the town. Many parents feel the accommodation is inadequate. They are concerned about the impact of provision which they consider is no longer fit for purpose, for example the small dining facilities.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**



## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### 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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

15 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Duchess's Community High School, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1DH

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues on 11 and 12 October. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- Duchess's High is a good and improving school with outstanding features.
- Senior leaders and managers are steering the school very well.
- Results in the main school and the sixth form are above average.
- Your personal development and the care, guidance, and support you receive are outstanding and helps keep you safe.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and improving.
- The curriculum is excellent and the provision of highly relevant vocational courses and extra activities are particular features.

Your teachers and the staff work very hard and want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they could:

- continue to raise standards in English at Key Stage 3
- improve the proportion of good and better teaching and learning.

I wish you every success in all you do in the future. It is well deserved.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock, HMI