

The Duston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122074
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	319512
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Richard Masterton

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	922
6th form	181
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Ros Clayton board
Headteacher	Jane Herriman
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
School address	Berrywood Road Duston Northampton NN5 6XA
Telephone number	01604 460004
Fax number	01604 454005

Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Duston School is a larger than average sized secondary school serving a predominantly suburban community that is economically and socially mixed. The large majority of students are White British. Approximately 15% of students come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups and about 9% of students do not use English as their first language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is about average. The proportion of students identified with learning needs and/or disabilities is above average and the school has Designated Special Provision for 25 students with autistic spectrum disorders.

When the school was last inspected in March 2007 it was given a Notice to Improve. The school was judged to require improvements to teaching, the development of systems to track students' progress and improved governance. An interim executive board replaced the governing body in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Duston School provides a satisfactory education for students and one that is good in the sixth form. It is improving rapidly. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

There has been sustained improvement since the previous inspection. Under the outstanding guidance of the very experienced members of an interim executive board, that temporarily replaced the governing body in April 2007, and the vigorous leadership of the headteacher, the school is now one where students' personal development and achievement are both satisfactory. Students grow to become responsible, well behaved young people who adopt healthy lifestyles, are proud of their school, and willing to become involved in their community. In their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development students are less mature and need more opportunity to reflect on what is important in their lives.

Good leadership and management are now evident in all aspects of the school's work. Managers at all levels strive to identify ways in which the school can be more effective and apply them rigorously. Former weaknesses in provision, whether in teaching or other aspects of support for students, have been tackled relentlessly. Nearly all have been eliminated and this shows the school's sustained good capacity to improve. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets legal requirements. There are many enrichment activities but a full work related curriculum is not yet in place. Few students continue with a foreign language after Year 9. Teaching is satisfactory. The majority of lessons are well planned with appropriate learning tasks offered. Students enjoy lessons particularly when given plenty of interesting things to do. However, learning would be more effective if their work was marked more helpfully and activities better matched to their previous attainment. Progress is monitored carefully through regular and careful assessment. Action is taken if any group falls significantly behind. Care, guidance and support of students are good. Students are safely looked after. The school meets the needs of students of all backgrounds. Those students with learning needs and/or disabilities receive good additional support. The designated special provision for autism enables students in its care to gain the skills and confidence to learn alongside their peers in the main school.

Students' overall achievement is satisfactory. From standards that are below average on entry to the school, students make progress driven by individual challenging targets.

The improved effectiveness of the school is raising standards. National test results at ages 14 and 16 years show an upward trend and standards are just below average.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Leadership and management are good. A focused range of successful improvement strategies have been prioritised and implemented for the sixth form. The good curriculum offers a wide range of courses including vocational subjects. A variety of academic and vocational pathways linked with partner institutions meets students' needs. Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support from committed teachers. Their progress is closely monitored and they receive excellent advice about future careers. Teaching and learning are good, characterised by excellent interaction with teachers and high expectations, but there is insufficient monitoring to help establish best

practice in all lessons. Personal development is good; students mature rapidly, becoming informed, responsible adults who contribute to their community. Their achievement is good, such that they catch up and reach average standards even though they started their courses with lower than average GCSE grades. There is a steady trend of improvement particularly with respect to the proportion of students achieving the higher examination grades.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide an enriched curriculum to promote students' greater spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Improve the quality of teaching through consistent and informative marking, matching work to students' prior attainment and checking for understanding.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards in mathematics, English and science reached by students at aged 14 have been consistently below the national average. Recent improvements in teaching have now started to bring improvement. Work in lessons more closely matches average standards, and the school's careful and accurate assessment of Year 9 students shows standards are just below average. At GCSE, school results have been below average but the school's robust assessments now indicate a similar improvement with standards becoming broadly average.

Following the many measures taken to secure better work and progress, the achievement of all groups of students is satisfactory and improving, thus raising their standards. The academic achievement of the students in the Designated Special Provision is satisfactory and they make good progress in overcoming their additional personal and social needs.

Students enter the sixth form with lower than average results from GCSE examinations. They leave with standards at A level that are average and they enjoy particular success in vocationally related studies. A pilot government statistical study has confirmed that sixth form students' achievement is clearly good. Students have caught up compared to students in other schools who started their courses with higher GCSE grades.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are satisfactory. Attendance has improved and is satisfactory. Students are becoming more mature and aspects of their personal development are good. They increasingly enjoy their education and are proud of their new school. Students are particularly happy with the recent improvements that have made them feel safe and well cared for. They say there is always someone to whom they can turn to if problems arise, including members of staff, the community police officer and fellow students. Some parents expressed concerns about behaviour but it is clearly good around the school and,

in lessons, students respond well to teachers' consistently high expectations. There are few instances of bullying and exclusion rates have fallen dramatically.

Students are allowed water in lessons. They are aware of healthy eating issues and the well supervised break periods are calm, social occasions. Students work safely in lessons and many take up the opportunities offered to develop personal fitness. Students make a good contribution to the school and local community and take on roles of responsibility, such as membership of the Cadre, the student representative body. Students are aware of the needs of the global community and have been able to provide significant support for a school in Africa.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students report that they have insufficient opportunity to form opinions about serious moral and spiritual issues through discussion and periods of reflection. They are polite and welcoming to visitors and many display a maturity and confidence in their relationships with adults. These personal skills indicate their development as rounded individuals, confidently able to approach life at work. But these positive features are affected by some weakness in the key skills of numeracy, literacy and information technology.

Students in the Designated Special Provision overcome their difficulties well. They understand the school's expectations for behaviour and learn to get on well with each other and their peers in mainstream classes. The personal development of sixth form students is good. Of special significance is the formal inclusion of community work in their programme. They train to be student mentors and to give help with sports at local primary schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The very high priority given by senior leaders to improving teaching and learning has had a marked impact on improving students' achievement. Although teaching and learning remains satisfactory overall, there is an increasing proportion of good lessons and some are outstanding. Most are well structured with interesting activities, good pace and learning objectives that are made clear to pupils. Common expectations ensure that there is better consistency in the format for lesson planning. Through rigorous monitoring of teaching and robust assessments of students' progress, senior leaders know where improvement is still required for standards to rise further. Behaviour is managed well. Students are calm, focused and ready to learn, although some restless behaviour occurs if work is not pitched accurately to their needs. Progress is good when teachers use skilful questioning to monitor progress and encourage students to think for themselves. Less effective lessons are too often teacher led, undemanding, do not check for understanding, or fail to show students how to improve. Some marking is good, showing students carefully where they have gone wrong with their work and how to improve, but good practice is not consistent across the school.

The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good and some is outstanding. It has led to good achievement. Teachers have high expectations and make good use of directed questions that challenge thinking and understanding. The quality of lesson preparation is high as is the interaction between teachers and students. However, limited monitoring of the quality of sixth form teaching and learning is slowing further improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory and improved since the last inspection. It meets statutory requirements and is being enriched to meet the needs of all students. Additional teaching of literacy in Years 7 and 8 helps new students with poor skills. Provision for students with additional needs in the Designated Special Provision is good. In Years 10 and 11, most students study within a largely academic curriculum. This has proved to be inappropriate for some students and has been a factor in depressing examination standards. There are now some vocational courses and a small number of students attend alternative courses at a nearby college. The school expects to improve its vocational provision next year through links the school has developed with other local providers. Very few students currently study a modern foreign language after the age of 14. Religious education, citizenship and personal education are taught through a global education curriculum. It has not yet contributed effectively enough to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because of some inconsistent teaching and not all students value this programme. Students considering the sixth form benefit from visits to higher education providers, but there is limited general use of visits to enrich the curriculum and promote personal development. Students and their parents appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities but many are linked to sport and students would like a greater variety. The sixth form curriculum is good with an appropriate variety of academic and vocational pathways linked with partner institutions that meet students' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides a high standard of care and support for its students. Health and safety routines and risk assessments are followed rigorously. Child protection procedures are clear and implemented quickly. Robust monitoring, together with a range of services available on the school site, ensures support is swift and appropriate. The school based police officer contributes strongly to students' sense of well-being. Very good procedures are now in place to track the progress, attendance and behaviour of all students against challenging targets. Managers have an accurate picture of the needs of all students and intervene with timely and effective guidance and support to arrest underachievement and improve attendance.

Students know how well they are doing in all subjects and what they need to do to improve, but they are not yet consistently involved in determining their own targets and checking progress. The school encourages parents' involvement through regular information about progress, behaviour and attendance. It has developed good links with local primary schools and new students settle in quickly. Sensitive care and guidance afforded to students in the Designated Special Provision helps them make good progress in overcoming their specific social and emotional difficulties. The school has improved the information it offers on courses and career pathways and this has already been of particular benefit to Year 10 students and parents.

Care, guidance and support in the sixth form are outstanding. There is a rigorous process of monitoring and tracking student performance. Tutor mentors, meeting regularly with students, are pivotal in ensuring the students remain on track to achieve their academic targets. A professional recruitment agency is effectively used to supplement advice given to students on

higher education and work opportunities. The students appreciate the support provided and it has contributed significantly to their good achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and the school interim executive board provide outstanding and decisive leadership. They have brought about rapid improvement in students' achievement and personal development. Managers tackle weakness in provision relentlessly. An intense programme of training and outstanding professional support has led to managers at all levels promoting students' development effectively with a common purpose and high commitment. Self-evaluation is now established at all levels. It is rigorous, very self critical and informed through objective comparisons and external advice. Target setting for pupils is precise and challenging. The culture of setting targets has improved effectiveness especially in securing better teaching and rising achievement. The school is committed to inclusion and meeting all students' needs; those with autism are successfully integrated into normal classes as much as possible. Students from ethnic minority communities and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same satisfactory progress as their peers.

In the last year, managers have eliminated a very large budget deficit without detriment to provision for students or to the pace of school improvement. The headteacher and senior managers have forged excellent working links with other schools and agencies in the community and this has greatly enhanced the curriculum, support and guidance for students. The interim executive board and the headteacher have successfully steered the school through a period of great change to establish a culture of student achievement, introduce new staffing structures and responsibilities and, not least, move to the new school building. Some of their work has not yet been in place for a sufficient period for results to show. Nevertheless, students' achievement is rising, and the school has re-established a good reputation in its local community, evidenced in part by the growing confidence of students to continue their post 16 education at The Duston School.

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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?	3	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?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	2	1

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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	1	
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

23 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Duston School, Northampton NN5 6XA

My colleagues and I greatly enjoyed our visit to your school. It was good to see you at work in your magnificent new building and to meet you. Your politeness and willingness to share your experience made it possible for us to collect some of the most important information that we needed and we are very grateful.

The Duston School provides a satisfactory standard of education and I am delighted to tell you that it is no longer subject to the Notice to Improve which had been necessary in the past. Many of you told us how much the school had changed. It is down to good leadership and management from your headteacher and the school's interim executive board. You receive good care and support. Teaching is satisfactory and has improved. Your lessons are planned consistently and when you are given interesting and challenging work they are very enjoyable. The curriculum is satisfactory except that it does not yet offer you enough opportunities to consider and reflect deeply about your lives, attitudes, beliefs and future actions. Your development into adults is satisfactory. We admired your good behaviour, the way you adopt a healthy lifestyle and your growing pride in the school. We were impressed by just how many students were involved in charities or adding to the life of the school. Your academic progress is satisfactory and standards are rising towards the national average. In the sixth form progress is good and standards are average.

I have asked that the school help improve your progress by:

- enriching your curriculum to give you the opportunity to consider spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues in more depth
- improving the quality of teaching with work better matched to your prior attainment, more helpful marking, and checks to see you understand.

Please play your part by working with your teachers, advise them when you do not understand and try hard to succeed.

Yours sincerely

R Douglas Masterton Lead inspector

23 May 2008

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Yours sincerely

R Douglas Masterton
Lead inspector