

The Dearne High - A Specialist Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106656
Local Authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	324439
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Moss HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John McDougall
Headteacher	Mr N Clark
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2006
School address	Goldthorpe Road Goldthorpe Rotherham South Yorkshire S63 9EW
Telephone number	01709 892211
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Age group	11–16
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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 Dearne High - A Specialist Humanities College is a larger than average 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school near Barnsley. The proportion of students attending the school eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. More than one quarter of the pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is well above the national average. A small proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known or believed to have a first language other than English is below average. The level of social and economic deprivation in the area served by the school is well above average. The school is part of a Safer Schools Partnership. The school is designated a specialist humanities college. It has achieved nationally recognised awards for its work on enterprise education, the Healthy Schools silver award, and 'Change School' status for its work with Creative Partnerships.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Dearne High - A Specialist Humanities College provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and is continuing to improve. Standards have risen since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grade GCSEs was 11% higher in 2008 than at the time of the last inspection. The rate of improvement has been faster than the rate of improvement nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics has also risen, at the same rate as nationally, although standards at the school in respect of this more demanding measure are well below average.

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are satisfactory. As a result of a consistent emphasis by staff, attendance has improved and is now average compared nationally and a little higher than in similar schools. Pupils say that there has been a significant improvement in behaviour at the school, particularly in lessons. They say also that there is still a small minority of pupils who do not conform and seem more interested in trying to impress their peers than in learning. This minority of pupils can be intimidating outside of school and occasionally on the school premises outside of lessons, if they can avoid supervision. Poor behaviour by pupils was also the concern expressed most commonly by parents in their responses to the inspection questionnaire.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The school has an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development in teaching and the recent drive to improve standards has resulted in improved pupil progress in lessons. This can be seen, for example, in mathematics, where a clear strategy and significant support to improve teaching and learning is starting to have an impact. Practice across the school is inconsistent, however, and this slows the progress of the pupils. Information about pupils' progress and achievement is often referred to in lesson plans, but the work planned does not always motivate the pupils and resources for learning are not adapted sufficiently to meet the full range of learning needs, for example, in relation to literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum is good. Pupils appreciate the wider range of courses and variety of extra-curricular activities, which the school ensures are accessible to all. The overall quality of care, guidance and support is good. The proportion of pupils leaving the school who are not in education, employment or training has reduced by 6% in the last two years.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are some good features. Senior leaders have articulated a clear and strong vision for improving the school. Developing pupils' speaking and listening is a key focus of the school's specialist status and is being well developed, leading to improvements in learning, pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The school has developed rigorous and reliable assessment and tracking systems that enable it to identify strengths and weaknesses accurately and consequently set challenging, but realistic targets for improvement. The combination of good quality self-evaluation, the trend of improving performance, well chosen and carefully planned improvements in the curriculum and teaching and learning means that the school has good capacity to improve further. The school works well in partnership with other agencies and has, for example, significantly increased the range of vocational courses available to pupils through two partnerships within the Dearne Valley and South-East Barnsley. Most parents are supportive of the school, but, while several provided examples of very good partnership between the school and parents, a similar number described a very different experience.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the variations in the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils make consistently good or better progress and reach higher standards, especially in mathematics and English.
- Make better use of data on pupils' attainment and progress so that activities and tasks in lessons are matched closely to pupils' learning needs.
- Improve the behaviour of the minority of pupils who intimidate others at the school, outside of lessons.

A small proportion of the 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

Pupils' levels of attainment on entry to the school are well below average. They make satisfactory progress through the school and, by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2008, 47% of pupils achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. When English and mathematics are included in the five or more GCSEs, however, the proportion was 22%, which is well below average. Almost all pupils achieved at least one nationally recognised qualification in 2008. Pupils make satisfactory progress given their starting points, but their rate of progress in mathematics is very slow. There are no significant differences between the progress made by different groups of pupils at the school, but a greater proportion of girls achieve higher grade GCSEs than boys and the proportion of pupils on free school meals that achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs in 2008 was half that of other pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Moral and social development has improved since the last inspection as a result of more consistent approaches to behaviour management and pupils are more aware of, and taking more seriously, their responsibilities and rights, as a result of the school's recently introduced code, 'Dearne Learners'. The school is providing an increasingly broad range of opportunities to broaden pupils' horizons and develop their cultural awareness. Pupils demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of health issues, but do not always act on what they know. The school provides for a healthy diet in the dining hall, but the take-up of school meals, though promoted well, is lower than the school would like and many students leave the school site at lunchtime. The number of pupils taking part in physical education and extra-curricular sport is increasing, however, and the performance of some students, in athletics for example, ranks amongst the best in the country.

Pupils say they feel safe at school. They say also that poor behaviour is now dealt with more effectively and there is much less bullying and arguing than there used to be. Pupils are generally compliant in lessons, even keen to please, and they say that lessons have become more enjoyable as behaviour has improved.

The pupils value the reward system and are very appreciative of both the respect shown to them by the staff and the priority given to the 'student voice' in improving the school. Pupils are pleased that they were able to bring about significant improvements to the toilet facilities

after these were criticised in the last inspection and are proud of their work as mentors to support other pupils' transition to the school from primary school. Year 7 pupils are evaluating the school's new integrated learning skills course, 'JUMP', which is designed to help pupils make more rapid progress when they join the school. Although 'JUMP' is at a very early stage of development, there are already signs that it is improving pupils' confidence and attitudes to learning. The school provides an increasingly broad range of opportunities for pupils to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for the workplace. Punctuality at the start of the school day is satisfactory, but too many students are slow to return to lessons after breaks. The wide and increasing range of vocational studies available at Key Stage 4, for example, is helping to improve pupils' enjoyment of learning and their attendance at school. Pupils' low standards of attainment limit, however, their future prospects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Relationships between staff and pupils are good and encourage mostly positive attitudes to learning. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and make clear to the pupils what is to be learned during lessons. Teachers have worked effectively with pupils to ensure pupils have a good understanding of the practice that supports good learning. Support staff work effectively in lessons with pupils with additional needs. In the best lessons observed during the inspection, the teaching was of high quality. In these lessons, teachers had high expectations of the pupils, the pace of the lessons was brisk and the activities and tasks were suitably challenging and interesting. As a result pupils showed very positive attitudes to learning, developed the skills of learning in teams and independently, and made good progress. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning in lessons. Teachers have extended the range of opportunities for pupils to talk, developing their own views and consolidating their learning, but teachers still tend to dominate discussions. In these lessons, pupils often become restless, their behaviour deteriorates and they make less progress. The quality of marking of pupils' work also varies.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students enjoy the more personalised approach to the curriculum developed since the last inspection as part of the school's drive to promote pupils' 'rights and responsibilities'. The curriculum contributes to increasingly positive attitudes amongst pupils, better attendance and more of them staying on into education and training post-16. Through its status as a specialist humanities college, the school has increased the opportunities available to pupils, including the wide range of well supported extra-curricular and enrichment activities such as theatre visits. One parent wrote with obvious pride about a pupil's contribution to a book of stories by pupils that the school has had published. The developments have resulted in improved outcomes for learners. There are, for example, significantly more pupils learning to play musical instruments. The school has an integrated learning skills course in Year 7 (JUMP) that is improving pupils' motivation and attitudes to learning. There are opportunities for Year 9 pupils to start GCSE courses early and get a head start. The very broad range of curriculum opportunities in Years 10 and 11, including vocational courses and the new Diplomas, meets the needs of students well. The school has achieved a national award for the quality of its work in enterprise education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils feel that there is good support for anyone under pressure and can cite examples of how it has really helped individuals. Safeguarding meets current government requirements, and procedures to ensure students' health and safety are thorough. There are good links with outside agencies, including the safer schools partnership, which are helping to improve pupils' behaviour, well-being, and attendance. Pupils in Years 9 and 11 say they received good help to make choices about courses. The recently introduced pastoral management teams are providing good support for all students. They combine the roles of guidance, mentoring, monitoring and rewards very effectively. They use data well to anticipate where students may become at risk of under-achievement, as well as to respond to identified needs. They discuss pupils' progress towards their targets and identify anything that might be holding individuals back. As a result, pupils say they get constant feedback on how well they are doing. Arrangements to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have improved since the last inspection. Some of the systems are still at an early stage of development and, as a result, classroom teachers are not consistently aware of the most important actions to be taken to meet the pupils' additional learning needs. The school uses a range of strategies effectively to help pupils with high levels of need stay in education, when they might otherwise be excluded or drop out. Several parents wrote to or spoke with inspectors about high quality and extensive support they had received, along with their children, which helped them deal with some very difficult situations. Other parents, however, feel strongly that the school does not communicate with them effectively and that they are unable, as a result, to support their children's learning and personal development as much as they would like.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Governors have a secure knowledge of the priorities for the school, ask increasingly challenging questions of the headteacher and are supportive of the changes being pursued by the headteacher to improve the performance of the school. The headteacher, supported by senior managers, has acted decisively to tackle underperformance, for example, in mathematics.

Members of staff with management responsibilities are increasingly enabled to identify and spread good practice, which is leading to improved teaching and learning. There is a growing ethos and culture in school which says Dearne High pupils can succeed and do well, brought about through sustained work on improving pupils' self-esteem and raising their aspirations. Target setting is robust and challenging and is now used to motivate students to aspire to higher levels of achievement. Performance management systems are in place that link directly to pupils' progress and performance.

The school places considerable emphasis on promoting equal opportunities and, as a result, for example, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make as much progress as their peers. Equalities policies for race, gender and disability are in place and reports of racist incidents are logged, along with the action taken. The school does not, however, have an equalities action plan. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory, with some good features. There is a shared understanding of the needs of the community both within the school and wider. Links developed through specialist college status and other links with the local, national and international communities ensure that learners have a wide range of opportunities to

develop their understanding and respect for people from other backgrounds. The school does not have a policy for promoting community cohesion, however, which prevents effective review and evaluation of this area of its work.

Financial procedures have met the national financial management standards. Governors monitor the school budget and expenditure effectively. Resources are used effectively and value for money is satisfactory. There has been considerable investment in a large team of support staff, which has increased the support available for pupils with additional needs. The school is achieving the targets set as part of its specialist status.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for talking to me and my colleagues and making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We spoke with you in lessons, around the school and in groups, looked at your work, read the results of questionnaires filled in by your parents/carers and spoke with some of your teachers. Here is a summary of our main findings, which I hope will be of interest to you.

- The Dearne High - A Specialist Humanities College provides you with a satisfactory education.
- You make satisfactory progress from your starting points when you join the school, but the standards you reach by the end of Key Stage 4 are very low compared with the national average.
- Your attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Your punctuality to school each morning is satisfactory, but you could help your teachers by getting to lessons promptly after breaks.
- You told us that behaviour at the school has improved since the last inspection and this is helping you to enjoy school more, but also that there is still a minority of pupils who cause trouble.
- Most your parents are supportive of school and many think it is doing a good job, but some of them also are concerned about behaviour and would like better opportunities to work with the school to help you learn.
- The school provides a wide range of courses and other activities that are helping you to learn better.
- The school provides you with good care, support and guidance that helps you make the best of the choices available to you.
- The headteacher and the staff at the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make things even better.

I have asked the headteacher to make sure that you are able to make consistently good progress in lessons, to make sure that teachers use the information they have about your learning and progress to design tasks that meet your particular learning needs, and to improve the behaviour of the minority of pupils who are making learning difficult for you. Many of you already make an important contribution to the school and I am sure you will want to do everything you can to support the staff in helping The Dearne High improve.