

Durham Sixth Form Centre

Providence Row, The Sands, Durham, County Durham DH1 1SG

Inspection dates

1–2 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and the highly skilled leadership team have established a culture in which students flourish and grow. Consequently, there is a healthy appetite for learning and achievement in an environment that demands high expectations for academic, vocational and personal excellence.
- Leaders have developed rigorous systems to monitor the progress students make towards aspirational targets. As a result, every student makes substantial and sustained progress.
- Overall, outcomes in academic and vocational subjects were significantly above the national average in 2016. The school's performance information shows students are on track to perform even more highly at the end of 2017.
- The highly experienced governors are unstinting in their challenge of school leaders. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the outcomes for students have improved rapidly.
- The quality of personal development and welfare is exceptional. All staff are committed to providing whatever it is the students need to succeed. Consequently, students' outcomes have improved strongly over the last three years.
- Students consistently behave well so that learning is never interrupted. Students are very well mannered. The ethos and culture in the school ensure that difference is celebrated and there is no discriminatory behaviour.
- The study programme is extremely well planned to meet the needs and aspirations of all students, and is aligned effectively to local employment opportunities. As a result, students develop skills, attributes and knowledge that provide very strong routes to higher education, apprenticeships and employment.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved as a result of myriad opportunities for professional development and the support and challenge of leaders. However, there is inconsistency in the way teachers challenge the group identified by the school as 'most able' in lessons.
- As a result of work to develop literacy skills, students' writing and speaking skills are improving. However, students' answers in lessons demonstrate that their speaking skills are not developing as rapidly as their writing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to share the outstanding practice which exists in teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in providing challenge for the cohort of students identified by the school as 'most able'.
- Further develop students' speaking skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher provides aspirational and visionary leadership. She is very ably supported by the senior leadership team who share her vision for the school to become a centre of excellence for post-16 teaching. Consequently, all aspects of the school have improved considerably since it became a sixth-form centre in 2013.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and plan rigorously for improvement. For example, leaders identified following the results in 2016, that some of the most able and most able disadvantaged girls had not achieved the same outstanding progress as their peers. As a result, a group of female students at risk of making less than outstanding progress in 2017 have been identified and a mentor employed to support them. Within half a term, the impact on the students' outcomes and self-confidence has been impressive.
- Senior leaders have a sophisticated approach to rating the development needs of each subject following the summer examinations. Where a subject is rated 'red', significant support and challenge are provided for teachers in that subject. Middle leaders recognise the impact of this developmental approach in bringing about significant improvements in the quality of teaching and students' outcomes.
- The headteacher systematically challenges senior leaders and they in turn hold middle leaders to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the outcomes of individual students. Middle leaders check the quality of their faculties and subjects robustly. Performance management targets and subject improvement plans link closely with the outcomes of monitoring and the needs of students. As a result, the quality of teaching and students' outcomes continue to improve rapidly.
- Opportunities for professional development are wide-ranging, including undertaking research projects. Teachers work together, sharing good practice, to develop particular aspects of the school. For example, groups are working on new course delivery, use of new technologies, and securing excellence in teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to be examiners and moderators. A middle leadership group is developing new leaders. Consequently, staff have excellent subject knowledge and are up to date with the latest academic and vocational courses and their examinations. Succession planning is strong because new leaders are developed effectively.
- Teachers and leaders are using their outstanding subject knowledge to support teachers in other schools. For example, mathematics support is provided to help improve teachers' subject knowledge in a school which requires improvement.
- Outcomes have improved rapidly over the last three years for all groups of students, including the disadvantaged. Excellent tracking systems enable staff to monitor the progress of individual students. A plethora of support and intervention is available to students who are underachieving in a particular subject. Consequently, all groups of students, including girls, the most able and the disadvantaged are on track to make outstanding progress in 2017.

- The needs of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well met in lessons. Effective training for teachers and support staff means that staff understand students' particular needs. As a result, outcomes for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have risen over the last three years in line with those for other students. The special educational needs funding is used highly effectively.
- The rich and varied curriculum ensures that students can take subjects that prepare them very well for their future learning and employment. School leaders understand well the nature of the local and regional economy. They are proactive in their work with universities, employers and voluntary organisations so that the curriculum provides many valuable opportunities for students to take courses that suit their interests and aspirations for higher education and future careers.
- The tutors' support programme has a focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) learning, charities, progression and well-being. For example, students have the opportunity to learn about mindfulness. Student committees, including the student council, police and communities, charities and sports committees further enhance SMSC learning and encourage leadership skills. Consequently, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Students who need to develop their skills in English and mathematics get the resources and support they need to do so, including, for example, work towards GCSE qualifications or to improve academic writing. A tangible appreciation of enterprise exists throughout the school. This provides students with extremely valuable opportunities for challenging and exciting work-related and project-based activities, such as work with local employers and the police force, that add richness and diversity to their learning.
- The school identifies a group of students with the potential to achieve the highest A-level grades. An imaginative 'Aspire' programme supports these 'most able' students to develop skills and attributes to help them gain places on competitive courses at Russell Group universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. As a result, students develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, their presentation and public speaking techniques, and their personal statements.
- A representative of the local authority visits the school termly, meeting leaders and governors. A review undertaken by the representative and colleagues from other local authorities in March 2016 provided a helpful baseline for leaders and governors to compare the school with other sixth-form providers. The resulting report supported and challenged leaders in their successful quest to become outstanding.

Governance

- Governance is outstanding.
- Governors are highly experienced leaders from a range of walks of life, including education. They are driven by a determination that all students in the school should make outstanding progress. Governors both challenge and support the school leaders, and strong governance has been integral to the rapid improvements seen since 2013.

- Governors receive excellent information in the headteacher's report. Governing body minutes record the clear strategic focus of the governing body and the concentration on outcomes, progress and quality provision. Governors undertake monitoring activities with school leaders, including talking to students, to reassure themselves that leaders' views match their own.
- The chair of the governing body ensures that the budget is balanced and appropriately spent. He is particularly active in ensuring that the school has state-of-the-art new buildings to house the increasing roll and the diversity of imaginative courses taught.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The positive ethos and culture of the school, supported by regular training and updates for staff, ensure the safety of students. Staff understand what to look out for, including in regard to radicalisation and extremism, and whom to report concerns to. Leaders work closely with other agencies, including the police. Consequently, students feel safe.
- Highly effective transition arrangements with feeder schools are in place. As a result, students' needs are well known before they arrive at Durham Sixth Form Centre. Appropriate support is then put into place for those students who need it.
- The records and checks made when recruiting staff meet requirements. Systems for checking and recording are well organised. The governing body takes its responsibility for safeguarding seriously, including monitoring checks on the single central record.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is central to the vision of the headteacher. She recognises that the quality of teaching must be outstanding in order for outcomes to be outstanding. Consequently, professional development opportunities are wide-ranging and impactful. No stone is left unturned in the drive for improvements in the classroom. As a result, very strong practice exists.
- Warm relationships between teachers and students result in a positive and supportive learning environment. Students display excellent attitudes to their learning, are keen to answer and ask questions, and work both collaboratively and independently.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which supports effective questioning and feedback to students and develops key subject vocabulary. For the most part, questions encourage students to think deeply and express themselves in detail. However, occasionally, questions require only a superficial response, which limits the development of students' speaking skills.
- Teachers employ well-structured learning activities which progressively build skills and knowledge. Where these are most effective, activities are well matched to the needs of students and result in exceptional outcomes over time. Students are challenged by their work and demonstrate high aspirations to meet their targets. Sometimes, the group identified by the school as the 'most able' are not challenged as rigorously as they might be in lessons and, consequently, undertake tasks which are too easy for them.

- Transitions between learning activities are managed very effectively so the momentum of learning is maintained and no time is wasted.
- Students' books and folders are well presented. Feedback from staff is challenging and precisely linked to the examination criteria. Students' response to the feedback demonstrates their determination to learn from their mistakes. This contributes to students' rapid progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Students are confident, independent, self-assured learners. Students make very good use of the wide range of opportunities staff provide to support their learning.
- Care and guidance for students are exceptional. The pastoral staff team know students very well and are focused on ensuring the best possible life chances for all their students. Staff do whatever it takes to make sure that students make the best possible progress.
- Bullying is rare. Tolerance is part of the culture of the school and individual differences are highly valued. Students are thoughtful and caring of each other.
- The school provides a range of counselling services to support the students. Consequently, students' emotional well-being is appropriately cared for.
- Students are taught to keep themselves safe, for example with drugs, alcohol and when driving. They understand the importance of safety on social media and the dangers of sexting. The school makes good use of external agencies that regularly hold health and well-being events in the refectory.
- Highly qualified, enthusiastic and independent careers advisers provide students with well-structured information, advice and guidance, based on rigorous scrutiny of local and regional labour market information. As a result, students develop the confidence, aptitude and behaviours to apply successfully to university or gain highly sought-after apprenticeships with prestigious national employers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- Students are considerate and respectful of each other and of staff. Behaviour incidents are very rare. Students enjoy being treated like adults. As a result, students are mature and sensible. Learning is not disrupted. The focus is on doing the best you can. These learning behaviours have been integral to the improvements in outcomes.
- Students' conduct both in lessons and around school is impeccable. Even where space is limited, for example in the refectory, students consider other's needs.
- Attendance has improved over the last four years and is now above the national average for secondary school pupils. Students know that good attendance is an expectation. Pastoral leaders work successfully with external agencies to support students whose health needs affect their attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Academic outcomes for students, including disadvantaged students, have improved year on year for the last three years. In 2016, the value added for academic courses was significantly above the national average overall. Boys in particular made outstanding progress in their A-level courses. Outcomes for girls, including the most able girls and the most able disadvantaged girls, were in line with the national average.
- The rigorous tracking systems ensure that the individual progress of each student is regularly interrogated. Historically, the school's own predictions for students' outcomes closely match actual results achieved in external examinations.
- The school's own progress information shows that academic outcomes for students leaving Year 13 are on track to rise significantly again in 2017, with outcomes for girls, the disadvantaged and the most able in line with outcomes for boys. This represents outstanding progress in academic subjects for all groups of students currently in Year 13.
- The outcomes of vocational courses at the end of Year 13 have been consistently above the national average and improving for the last three years. The disadvantaged students have outcomes well above other students nationally. In 2016, students attained nearly a grade higher than the national average in their vocational courses. Students make exceptional progress in vocational courses. The school's own progress information shows that vocational outcomes are set to rise even further in 2017.
- Outcomes in AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12 have risen over the last three years and are significantly above the national average overall, particularly for boys. A greater proportion of students are attaining good passes in the AS-level examinations than the national average.
- Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress in line with their peers.
- The large majority of students who enrol on courses go on to complete their studies, get the grades they need and progress to university, employment, further education or an apprenticeship. School leaders and careers advisers are keenly aware that young people's aspirations may change during the first year of sixth form. Accordingly, they provide the support, information and advice that these students need to readjust their career and learning plans and to transfer to further learning or employment. The progress and destinations of all students are tracked thoroughly.

School details

Unique reference number	114310
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10000869

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	School for post-16 students
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	16–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,313
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	1,313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dennis Southwell
Headteacher	Ellen Beveridge
Telephone number	0191 383 0708
Website	www.durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk
Email address	dsfc@durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	May 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- In September 2013, the school became a centre for sixth-form education only. Prior to that time, the school had been an 11 to 18 secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is lower than the national average for secondary schools.

- The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average for secondary schools.
- Almost all students are White British.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook observations in lessons and conducted learning walks, making short visits to lessons. Leaders accompanied inspectors on the learning walks and in some of the observations. During visits to lessons, inspectors looked at the work of students and discussed their work with them.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, 81 responses to the student questionnaire and 32 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with groups of students formally and spoke to them informally outside lessons.
- A range of documents provided by the school were scrutinised, including the self-evaluation document, improvement plans, minutes of the governing body and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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