

Darton College

Ballfield Lane, Darton, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S75 5EF

Inspection dates 5–6 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The principal, senior and middle leaders share high expectations and total commitment to ensure that every student achieves their potential, whatever their circumstances. Governance is excellent. As a result, the school has made significant improvements since the previous inspection and continues to do so.
- Students' achievement is good. Students make good progress from their starting points. Standards in different subjects vary but most are at least in line with national figures and attainment overall is above average. There is a clear trend of improvement.
- Teaching is good and in some lessons is outstanding. The best teaching makes links with real-life situations to make the lessons interesting and valuable.
- Students and staff share a strong sense of community, enhanced by the design and layout of the new building. Students say they feel safe and valued. Behaviour is good and bullying is rare. Attendance is above average.
- The school provides outstanding care and support for all students and particularly for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The hub, the pupil support area, nurture groups and a strong pastoral team of teachers and teaching assistants ensures that all students' needs are met.
- The school has a stimulating and vibrant atmosphere, enhanced by an increasingly relevant and challenging curriculum which effectively supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to make sure that all students make rapid progress. Occasionally teachers do not give enough feedback on how students can make better progress.
- There is some variation between students' achievement in different subjects, although gaps in achievement are closing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, three of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons, around the school and in more formal meetings with different year groups.
- Meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the shadow governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 56 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's most recent parental questionnaire and the letters and emails from parents who sent comments to the team.
- Inspectors looked at the information about past examination results and the school's recent assessment information about the progress and achievement of students since September 2012. They looked at information on behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at the school's own evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, safeguarding information, minutes of governing body meetings, school policies and details on how the school spends the pupil premium funds. (The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, for students known to be eligible for free school meals and for students whose parents serve in the armed forces, in order to improve outcomes for these students.)
- Inspectors took account of the 37 staff questionnaires and looked at the professional development of teachers and performance management systems.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sally Lane	Additional Inspector
Janet Pruchniewicz	Additional Inspector
Mary Lanovy-Taylor	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized 11-16 comprehensive school.
- Nearly all the students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is just above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average and steadily increasing over time.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- No students attend alternative, off-site provision.
- The school holds specialist status in the humanities.
- The principal is also executive headteacher of a nearby primary school.
- Since the previous inspection the school has moved into a new building.
- A shadow governing body took over from the interim executive board on 1 October 2012 and full governance will be in place later this year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and eliminate the variation in students' achievement by:
 - making sure tasks are set always at the right level of challenge for individual students
 - making sure students fully understand what they are to learn from the outset of lessons
 - improving the consistency of marking and feedback so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve and ensure that students respond and so strengthen their involvement in their own learning
 - continuing to develop strategies to enthuse and inspire students as effectively as in the best lessons
 - further raising attainment in those subjects where standards are only average or below when compared with national averages, including science and design technology.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well. Most join the school with attainment that is just below average and make good progress. Achievement is better in Years 7-9 than it is in Years 10-11 because older students have not benefited from the vastly improved teaching for as long. Attainment at GCSE is steadily increasing. In several respects it was above the national average in 2012 and is set to rise higher in the current academic year. The steadily rising proportion of students who join the school later than is usual, in Years 10 or 11, are supported effectively so that they can achieve well.
- Students achieve particularly well in the performing arts, physical education and English. The mathematics department is rapidly catching up and the proportion of students on track to achieve five or more GCSE subjects at A*-C, including English and mathematics, is increasing each year. Girls achieve particularly well and the school is implementing many strategies to ensure that boys' attainment and progress matches that of girls.
- Students' achievement is less impressive in some subjects, such as science and technology subjects. The school is working hard to address this. Lesson observation, scrutiny of work and the school's own tracking data shows an acceleration in rates of progress.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium funding make good progress. Average points scores across a wide range of GCSEs, including English, show that these students do as well as similar students nationally and better in English and mathematics. However, they do less well than other students in the school, currently two thirds of a GCSE grade below others in both English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Those students who are supported at school action make as good progress as similar students nationally and those at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs sometimes make better progress. Progress in English is better than in mathematics.
- A small number of students are entered early for GCSE mathematics and many students are entered early for science. Most of these students then choose to improve their grades in the summer examination the following year. Students are entered early for film studies and Polish with good success.
- The school has put a very strong focus on promoting the value and pleasure of reading and has used catch-up funding and some pupil premium funds to improve the library. Students have fully embraced this drive so that the number of boys borrowing fiction from the school library has increased from 479 last year to 2796 in this academic year, and for girls it has risen from 816 in 2012 to 2501.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good in most lessons and in some it is outstanding. Where teaching is outstanding, seen, for example, in English, dance, history and physical education, teachers create lessons which challenge, inspire and encourage students to think, reflect, debate and evaluate what they are learning.
- Good and better lessons set high expectations for students' participation. These lessons move at a brisk pace but not so brisk that students are left behind. Plenty of opportunities are provided to reinforce learning and practise skills, particularly for numeracy and literacy. Relationships are well established and positive.
- Teachers provide a very positive atmosphere for learning and so build students' confidence in what they can achieve. They are able to express their own ideas and take risks with their answers so that learning is both enjoyable and rapid.
- Teachers make good use of technology and are starting to make even better use of the open spaces of the new building in innovative ways.

- The tracking of students' progress is rigorous and effective so that all teachers have a very clear understanding of the rate of students' progress and can take immediate action where there is a dip in performance. The 'two for two' strategy pairs individual teachers with two specific students for a fortnight to accelerate their progress and make a difference.
- The quality of teaching and support for students in the hub is very good. Students learn in a calm, purposeful atmosphere with plenty of individual attention and support. The nurture groups in Years 7 and 8 are equally effective. The Year 8 group has been so successful that it is now disbanded because all the students are able to return to mainstream lessons.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs receive excellent support from teaching assistants and through the school's many partnerships with external agencies.
- All teachers provide opportunities in lessons for students to evaluate their own progress but sometimes this is not especially helpful to learning. This is because students are sometimes not sufficiently clear from the introduction about what they are assessing. Most teachers plan lessons which follow on precisely from students' previous learning, but sometimes opportunities are missed to pitch the work at the right level for all students to be challenged and stretched.
- The quality of marking and feedback to students is inconsistent across departments and individual teachers. It varies from excellent to cursory. Not enough teachers are providing clear comments on how students can improve and there is no expectation that students will respond when comments are given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is typically good both in lessons and around the school. Students are welcoming and courteous to visitors and respectful to each other and adults.
- Students generally have positive attitudes to learning. However, some do not always respond to teachers' comments in marked books.
- Students say they feel safe and secure in school and particularly enjoy the rewards systems which encourage participation, effort and good behaviour. Some students enjoy contributing to the school by serving on various 'task teams' looking at, for example, catering, charity fundraising, eco matters and school policies.
- Bullying is rare and is dealt with swiftly if it occurs. Students are consulted about systems to deal with bullying and feel that their voice is heard. Students value the mentoring they receive. They are fully aware of the different kinds of bullying which can occur, including homophobic and cyber-bullying, but say it is not a problem in this school.
- Attendance is consistently at least average and sometimes above. Punctuality to school and lessons is good because of the changes to the school day and the effective systems to support good attendance and follow up absence. 'Pupil support' area where students whose behaviour is causing concern can receive individual attention. These students have behaviour contracts and are supported until their confidence, powers of concentration and general behaviour improve. The students working in this area were very enthusiastic and pleased with the support they receive.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, the school's recent internal surveys and sent in emails or letters to the inspection team were very positive about behaviour, safety and learning.

The leadership and management are good

- The vision, dynamism and drive of the principal, totally supported by the governing body, are key factors in the school's rapid improvement and success. The principal manages to bring the best out of everyone and has established a dynamic but supportive professional climate in school. Senior and middle leaders and all the teaching staff share and reflect these qualities and values.

- School leaders share the ambition to be outstanding but know there is more to do in raising attainment further and securing more outstanding teaching and achievement.
- The school is highly inclusive and does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. All adults work relentlessly to remove or tackle any problems so that all students can achieve well. The rigorous tracking system ensures that leaders know exactly which students require extra support.
- The school has a very accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It has clear plans to raise standards further by its unrelenting focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- All teachers know that they are accountable for the progress their students make. Performance management is rigorous and effective in ensuring that standards rise, practice is developed where necessary and pay progression is linked to successful outcomes.
- Middle leaders have substantial responsibility for tracking progress, analysing and planning interventions, checking on the quality of work in their own and other departments, delivering training and sharing good practice. They carry out their role well.
- The curriculum is dynamic, ever-changing and evolving to respond to students' needs and interests. In the drive to raise attainment and academic achievement more students than ever are following the English Baccalaureate route. However, there are four pathways to suit students of all abilities. There are many special events such as 'stop the clock' and 'wow' days. Numerous clubs and trips are provided, with opportunities for international trips, for example, to Poland, the Bay of Naples and the European parliament.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Students learn about faith, politics, international development, poverty and culture in a wide range of lessons and visits.
- Pupil premium funds are being spent on providing many more books in the library, nurture group teaching and small intervention groups for English and mathematics. As a result of this funding, the gap between students known to be entitled to receive the funding and others is closing rapidly in English but more slowly in mathematics.
- The school has a wide range of educational partnerships and the executive role of the principal in a local primary school is benefiting both schools because they are able to share expertise. Transition arrangements are excellent because the pupils from Year 6 attend Darton for the last two weeks of the summer term so that they are thoroughly familiar with their secondary school and ready to start the following September. The school also has strong links with local sixth form and college providers.
- The great majority of parents hold the school in high regard.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students meet all statutory requirements extremely well.
- The school has benefited enormously from the support and encouragement of the local authority. This is decreasing because the school has improved and no longer needs such support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is excellent. The shadow governing body is about to hand over to the full governing body and many of the interim executive board members will be standing. Governors have overseen the vast improvements in all aspects of the school in the last three years. Governors' meetings take place during the school day so that they can see for themselves what is happening. Many governors visit regularly to meet with their linked departments and the school has a dedicated website to keep governors informed about what is happening in school. The governors fully understand how to measure students' achievement against other schools and are robust in holding the staff to account for any underachievement. They undertake regular training and have the necessary expertise to ensure that finance is managed effectively to support students' achievement. Pupil premium funding is rigorously monitored to ensure that it is being used to the best effect.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	106651
Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	400058

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 of pupils on the school roll	912
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Holmes
Headteacher	Sharon Rossides
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2011
Telephone number	01226 382568
Fax number	01226 382350
Email address	dartoncollege@barnsley.org

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