

Teesdale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114303
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	338334
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Alison Thomson

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	776
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	151
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Jane Philbrick
Headteacher	Mr P Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 28 teachers and 28 lessons, and held meetings with the governors, staff and groups of pupils. The inspectors observed the school's work and analysed 146 questionnaires from parents and carers, 100 from students and 63 from staff. The inspectors also looked at documents and policies including those relating to the safeguarding of pupils, at the data the school had collected about the students' progress and at the school's records of its monitoring of the quality of teaching.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- students' attainment and progress, with particular respect to the sixth form and that of higher attaining students
- how effectively students are guided to learn independently and assess for themselves how well they are doing
- the effectiveness of middle leaders in driving whole-school improvements.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. Most students are White British and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is lower than average. The school is a specialist science college and has many awards, including the Artsmark and the International Schools Award for developing students' awareness of other cultures. The school has been having difficulty in recruiting some leaders of departments recently.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Teesdale is a good school. Outcomes for students in the main school are outstanding because they achieve particularly well and feel very safe. They describe the school as, 'very friendly and welcoming', and their teachers as, 'most helpful'.

Since the previous inspection there have been many improvements. Students' learning and progress are good and the standards they attain are high by the end of Key Stage 4. This results in outstanding achievement. Teaching has improved and is now good overall, although there is still a small percentage of teaching that is satisfactory. This is a barrier to further acceleration of students' progress. Attendance has improved and is high. Much of this is due to the school's work on reducing the persistent absence of a few students. Central to the improved success of the school is the restructured leadership team, with well-defined responsibilities and a shared clear vision of what needs to be done. Monitoring and evaluation of students' progress are rigorous. Any underachievement is identified early and strategies put in place to redress this. For example, previous underachievement of the most able students is improving as they are being given work that offers them more challenge.

Attainment in the sixth form has not improved significantly since the previous inspection and is still average by the end of Year 13. Similarly, progress remains satisfactory. The school recognises that its main area for development is to improve outcomes for students in the sixth form. It has identified enhancing their study skills and matching courses better to their needs as ways of doing this, supported by closer monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Sixth formers, however, were keen to tell us that they enjoyed their time in school and appreciated the support that their teachers gave them. The majority of parents and carers were positive about all aspects of school. However, it is clear that the school does not engage well with all parents and carers at present, in areas such as helping them to support their children's learning.

Students were very polite and welcoming during the inspection and accurately rated their own behaviour as good. They see their learning and progress as improving and say they learn best when they get to be fully involved in lessons. They say that they are particularly well cared for and are very proud of their involvement in initiatives such as visiting local primary schools to talk about how to prevent and deal with bullying.

The school's specialism is contributing increasingly well to its improvements. Targets in science and mathematics have been met well and there are good links being set up with scientific establishments in the area. The many improvements since the previous inspection and accurate self-evaluation mean that the school's capacity to improve even further is good.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes in the sixth form by:
 - developing students' study skills and readiness for independent learning as they embark on sixth form courses
 - enhancing the quality assurance of teaching and learning and other aspects of provision
 - increasing the match of courses to students' aspirations and capacity for learning.
- Accelerate the rate of progress by:
 - having lessons where teaching is always good or better
 - sharing the best practice in teaching that exists in the school more widely
 - providing clear success criteria in all lessons so that students can assess for themselves more easily how well they are learning.
- Engage better with all parents and carers to:
 - help them support their children's learning
 - inform them more clearly how the school is dealing with changes in staffing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Inspection evidence from lesson observations confirmed the school's view that learning and progress are good. Along with their high attainment, this means that students' achievement is outstanding. Most students are involved in learning well with their teachers and with each other. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 10 Spanish lesson where they were skilfully guided to check for themselves how well they had met the learning criteria and what they needed to do to reach the next level. A focus on looking at the learning of the highest attaining students during the inspection confirmed that their learning in most lessons is also good. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, guided well by teaching assistants. Students enter the school in Year 7 with overall above average attainment. All groups of students make good progress, especially in Years 10 and 11 and by the time they reach the end of Year 11, attainment is high in most subjects, particularly so in English.

Students are in no doubt that they feel safe in school. They have a good understanding of what it means to be healthy. The majority choose to take advantage of the new menus where they appreciate the high standard of food provided. They enjoy the many opportunities to take part in sporting activities and clubs. Students contribute well to the local community through their involvement in projects such as the designing of a new Youth facility. The school council is very active and its members are proud of their ideas for a new school uniform. Students cooperate well together and have good information and communication technology skills, although there was little evidence of this seen in practice in the lessons visited. Students showed some good budgeting skills during

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tutorial sessions. Coupled with their high attendance and high attainment in English and mathematics, this indicates they have good skills for their future economic well-being. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their understanding of international cultures is particularly good, because of the school's good promotion of community cohesion. However, their understanding of minority ethnic religions and cultures, reflecting those found in the United Kingdom as a whole, are less well developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good overall, but it is variable and the best practice is not shared well enough. Generally, good quality teaching caters well for the students' differing needs, including those who are more able or particularly gifted or talented and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Behaviour in lessons is good and the approach of students is purposeful. In the better lessons tasks are challenging and teachers deploy a variety of strategies that secure interest and enjoyment. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. Teachers promote high expectations

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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and use praise well. Effective questioning revises learning points, maintains students' attention and encourages them to think more deeply and reflect on their answers. Assessment is used well to stimulate learning and raise attainment. For example in a Year 10 design and technology lesson, the teacher frequently gave feedback individually on what was being done well and what could be improved. This resulted in craft skills being far higher than those usually seen. In some lessons the teacher talks too much and opportunities are missed to engage students more fully in their learning. Sometimes, there is insufficient variety of tasks and it is not clear what the criteria for success are. This means that learning becomes passive and the rate of progress slows. Teachers' marking is usually clear and helpful; pupils know the targets they are aiming for and how they can improve their work.

The curriculum is becoming more effective in helping to raise achievement. It is well organised and provides a broad range of experiences which meet students' needs increasingly well. In Years 10 and 11 there are clear pathways that incorporate academic and vocational courses, such as construction in a dedicated area of the school. A varied programme of enrichment and extra-curricular activities in the arts and sporting pursuits contributes well to the students' enjoyment and personal development. Care and support, particularly of the most vulnerable students, are real strengths of the school. These are reinforced well with outside agencies. The school is rightly proud of its successes in helping vulnerable students overcome difficult and challenging personal circumstances. Transition arrangements are good and students are particularly well prepared for entry into the school. This is helped by a good induction programme and an integrated humanities and arts curriculum. Careers advice is effective, but advice given in Year 11 on the choices of courses in the sixth form is not always sharply focused on the needs and aspirations of the students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher leads a strong team of senior leaders who have a clear shared vision of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The newly formed leadership group is providing a strong impetus for improvement across the school. Management of teaching and learning is particularly good and there is clear evidence of accurate lesson observations and good advice leading to improvements. Difficulties in recruiting some middle leaders have resulted in some of the senior leaders taking on these roles, in

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addition to their own, successfully. However, middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in monitoring their areas. The school engages well with the majority of parents, but has not allayed the fears of a minority who are concerned about issues such as the impact of changes in staffing. The school improvement plan is a comprehensive working document with clear actions and targets which are particularly focused on successfully improving students' attainment and progress. Most members of staff are positive about all aspects of the school, but a minority feels that they do not have the opportunity to contribute well enough to the school's self-evaluation at present.

The school promotes excellent safeguarding procedures as part of its good quality care. These procedures are held up by the local authority as being exemplary. Leaders endeavour to ensure that equality of opportunity is good for all pupils, with discrimination not tolerated at all. Effective partnerships have been instrumental in bringing about many of the improvements. For example, a partnership with a local college has helped to boost achievement in construction. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They challenge and monitor the school's performance well, but are not fully involved in the evaluation of their own effectiveness at present.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The number of students entering the sixth form is increasing. About 80% of students continue from Year 12 to Year 13. The GCSE results of those joining the sixth form are

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slightly lower than in sixth forms nationally. Outcomes in GCE A level, AS level and Applied A level courses in 2009 were broadly average, with some variation between subjects and better than average performance in applied courses. A few students choose or are advised to withdraw from courses and continue with a lighter load. Outcomes in relation to starting points have improved a little over recent years and the school's data, based on module tests and teachers' assessment to March this year, suggest this improvement is set to continue. Students' personal development advances while in the sixth form and they are articulate and confident; they are pleased to have the opportunity to make a good contribution to the life of the school. They enjoy their time in the sixth form.

The school is aware that teaching is more successful in some subjects than in others. Some teachers have high expectations of students and encourage them to take responsibility. For example, in a business studies lesson students very competently acted as 'teacher' to the class. In some cases, fairly new work seemed to be being introduced very close to examinations. Some students say that they were taken aback by the demands of Year 12 work and their first results were disappointing. They would have valued more guidance on how to organise themselves for sixth form study. However, some appreciate the good advice given on retaking modules and with planning for higher education. There has been expansion of the already extensive curriculum offer, mainly with vocational courses and sometimes, through partnerships with other providers. Some courses have been more successful and cost effective than others. The provision and its quality assurance remain in a state of development. At present, leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Nearly 20% of parents and carers returned the questionnaire. Most felt that the school kept their children safe. A minority did not agree that the school was well led or managed or that the school helped them to help their children's learning. A small minority of parents and carers commented that they were worried about the number of different teachers their children were having in particularly subjects. The inspection team felt that the school was well led and managed, but felt that the school could do more to help all parents and carers to support their children's learning. They also felt that the school could engage more with all parents and communicate better how the implications of any changes in staffing were being addressed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Teesdale School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 146 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 776 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	26	82	56	22	15	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	47	32	85	58	10	7	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	19	91	62	23	16	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	25	85	58	19	13	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	18	12	90	62	27	18	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	11	71	49	45	31	5	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	20	81	55	23	16	3	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	28	19	76	52	28	19	5	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	18	79	54	32	22	5	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	12	71	49	36	25	13	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	10	74	51	33	23	9	6
The school is led and managed effectively	24	16	58	40	32	22	20	14
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	23	84	58	21	14	5	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Teesdale School, Barnard Castle, DL12 8HH

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you very much. We judged your school to be good and we would like to share with you why we think this is so and what the school can do to make things even better.

Your achievement in the main school is excellent; you learn and progress well and the standards you attain are high. You behave well and most of you engage well in your lessons. You receive particularly good care and support and as a result, you told us that you feel particularly safe in school.

Outcomes in the sixth form are not quite as good and this is one of the key areas where we believe that the school could improve most. We have asked your headteacher and other leaders to develop your study skills and readiness for independent learning at the beginning of Year 12. We have also asked them to monitor and evaluate more closely your teaching, curriculum and the guidance you receive, and to increase the match of courses better to your aspirations and abilities.

Throughout the school we believe that you could progress even faster if the teaching in all your lessons was always good or better. We feel that this could be done by sharing the aspects that are present in the best teaching. In particular, each of your lessons should have clear ways of enabling you to be able to tell how well you are learning. You can help here by asking if this is not clear to you.

Your parents and carers are mainly positive about all aspects of the school. However, we have asked the headteacher to make it clear to all parents and carers how they can support you in your learning and also to explain to them better the steps that the school takes when there are changes in staffing.

We would like to wish you all the best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Dr Alison Thomson

Lead inspector

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