

Inspection of The Duston School

Berrywood Road, Duston, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN5 6XA

Inspection dates: 22–25 June 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Since the previous inspection the school has improved considerably. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can learn and achieve. Most pupils enjoy school and work hard. The school's mantra of 'knowledge itself is power' is evident through the curriculum. The climate for learning is strong.

Pupils are kept safe. They know who to turn to if they have any concerns. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils behave very well in lessons and during social times. Should bullying occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively.

Pupils are respectful. Staff and pupils develop trusting relationships because of the school's clear expectations and values. The school is calm and orderly. Low-level disruption is not tolerated. This consistent approach to managing behaviour enables all pupils to focus on their learning. The curriculum and the many additional activities help pupils to become resilient, confident and independent.

Children get off to a good start in early years. Students in the sixth form value the support they receive and are proud of their school. They are positive role models for younger pupils.

Pupils told us that this school has improved significantly in the last few years. They appreciate that leaders care for them and for their staff's well-being.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors lead with a clear moral purpose. They have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Staff, overwhelmingly, say that they are proud to work at the school. They know what leaders want to achieve. They recognise many improvements in recent years. Governors, leaders and staff work with determination to keep on improving all aspects of the school.

Leaders have worked resolutely to improve the curriculum. They have made sure that the curriculum is broad and ambitious. The quality of education is good. Teachers make sure that learning is sequenced and progressive over each year. They plan learning which revisits and builds on what pupils already know.

Staff make sure that children enjoy learning in an organised early years environment. They teach reading effectively. Children build up their phonics knowledge and skills well. Staff ensure that children develop their reading and mathematical learning. By the end of Reception, children also have the physical, social and emotional skills to succeed in the next stage of their education. The majority of children achieve the early learning goals.

Teachers make sure that pupils in the primary phase learn well in all subjects. Pupils learn particularly well in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are refining

some subject curriculums to be even more focused on key knowledge, for example geography and computing.

Leaders make sure that subject curriculums are well developed in the secondary phase. There are particular strengths in English, mathematics, science and geography. Leaders make sure that there is a common approach to teaching. Teachers use knowledge organisers and workbooks in most lessons. However, leaders have not ensured that all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn as well as their peers in all subject areas. Some parents whose children have SEND say that their children's needs are not being consistently met. Leaders have sound plans in place to improve the curriculums in design, technology and art further in Years 7, 8 and 9. Leaders have brought about much improvement in some subjects, for example French and Spanish.

Leaders have ensured that reading is a priority. They have provided effective training for staff. In the primary phase, phonics is taught well. Secondary-aged pupils who need support with their reading have specific reading lessons. Staff make sure that pupils catch up quickly and are given the help that they need. Pupils read well and say that they are becoming more confident in their reading. Staff promote a strong culture of reading. Pupils gain from story time sessions and 'academic reading' tutor periods.

Leaders have established a calm and orderly environment that is focused on learning. Teachers secure high standards of behaviour. Pupils' conduct is very positive. Leaders have put systems in place to improve pupils' attendance. However, attendance has been affected by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Leaders have revised their approach to reducing absence because of the pandemic. They have employed extra staff to work with parents and carers to support their children to improve attendance. However, too many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are not attending regularly enough.

Students enjoy the sixth form and achieve well. They show maturity and independence. They act as positive role models. Many of them take part in the academic mentoring of younger pupils. They play an active part in the school.

Pupils gain from a strong personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Pupils are given opportunities to understand equality and diversity. They learn about different cultures and religions. Leaders provide secondary-aged pupils with information, advice and guidance to help them explore career options. However, not all sixth-form students gain from work-related learning.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have established the 'positive impact centre', working with specific pupils to address their social, emotional and behavioural needs. It has contributed to improving attendance and behaviour as well as reducing exclusions.

Governors understand their responsibilities. They effectively support leaders and challenge them. They are ambitious for all pupils and mindful of staff welfare.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are trained to understand their safeguarding responsibilities. They recognise when pupils are worried or concerned. Designated safeguarding leaders know pupils very well. They take the right steps to keep pupils safe. Leaders keep detailed safeguarding records. They work with other agencies to help support pupils when needed.

Leaders carry out the required checks on new staff before they start working at the school. Pupils learn to recognise risk in different situations and how to be safe. For example, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online, and older pupils learn about the risks involved in knife crime.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that pupils with SEND learn as well as their peers. Leaders need to make sure subject curriculums are ambitious and adapted to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.
- There are too many pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, who are persistently absent from school. This absence is having a negative effect on their learning and progress. Leaders need to support and challenge parents whose children do not attend school regularly.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school [here](#).

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.

School details

Unique reference number	138214
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10184109
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,849
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Richard Monk
Principal	Samuel Strickland
Website	www.thedustonschool.org
Date of previous inspection	20 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new primary phase headteacher started at the school in September 2020.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has opened its positive impact centre; this acts as the school's own alternative provision.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased. The primary phase now has pupils in all year groups.
- During the inspection, pupils in the Year 1 and 3 'bubbles' needed to self-isolate due to COVID-19.
- The school uses two alternative providers to meet the needs of pupils. These are Seeds of Change and Hospital Outreach Education.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. Inspectors deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- Inspectors met with the principal and other senior leaders. Inspectors met four members of the governing body online, including the chair of trustees.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: English, reading, geography, computing and PSHE. Inspectors also looked at a range of subjects on the first and last day of the inspection.
- Inspectors visited 102 lessons, many with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils. Inspectors met with subject leaders and class teachers.
- Inspectors met with designated safeguarding leaders and looked at safeguarding records. Inspectors also met with the special educational needs coordinators for the primary and secondary phases of the school.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils to talk about the quality of education and other aspects of school life. Inspectors also met with a group of support staff and spoke with staff and pupils informally.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents. Inspectors looked at the school website, policies and published information about the school's performance.
- Inspectors observed pupils at the start of the school day, and during lunchtimes and breaktimes. Inspectors observed tutor time and an assembly.
- Inspectors met informally with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors considered the views of 176 parents who completed the Ofsted Parent View survey, as well as the 128 text responses received. Inspectors considered the 107 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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