

# Inspection of Durham Johnston Comprehensive School

Crossgate Moor, Durham, County Durham DH1 4SU

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Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since February 2015. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Durham Johnston is a school where pupils feel safe, happy and valued. There are strong, caring relationships between staff and pupils and the school has a warm, harmonious ethos. Students demonstrate a strong moral compass and are proud to be part of the school community.

Pupils are supported to develop a strong understanding of the world around them. In line with one of the school's core values of public service, a significant number of pupils demonstrate a tangible commitment to make a positive contribution to their local community and beyond, both now and in the future.

Behaviour in lessons and around school is consistently calm and purposeful due to effective systems built on strong relationships. Pupils and parents and carers report that bullying is rare but, when it happens, it is dealt with highly effectively. Attendance at school is very high. Pupils consistently display a positive attitude to their studies.

Pupils achieve well overall in Year 11 examinations. Pupils who start secondary school with a strong knowledge of the primary curriculum achieve exceptionally well at the end of Year 11, compared to similar pupils nationally. The achievement of other pupils is more variable, although still broadly in line with national averages for similar pupils.

The sixth-form provision is exceptional. A focus on academic reading supports students to develop their understanding beyond the norm for their age. This, coupled with expert support from teachers, allows students to achieve exceptionally highly in external examinations, preparing them well for future destinations. Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in the sixth form is strong. The high proportion of students who join the sixth form at the start of year 12 receive a curriculum offer which meets their different starting points. This enables students to succeed.

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

Staff at Durham Johnston have designed curriculums that capture pupils' interests. What pupils study often exceeds that expected by the national curriculum.

When teachers check that pupils have secure prior knowledge and adjust their teaching where necessary, pupils learn very effectively. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They work skilfully with pupils to help them develop a deep understanding of what has been studied. Pupils are able to apply this knowledge flexibly, including linking things they have learned in one subject to new learning in another area of the curriculum. However, these strengths are not consistently evident. In some lessons, teachers do not check what pupils have learned, or do not adjust the lesson to address misconceptions or gaps in knowledge. In these lessons, some pupils struggle to keep up and do not develop a secure understanding of what is being taught.

Support for pupils with SEND is variable. The needs of pupils across the school are carefully identified. Appropriate plans are put in place to support pupils with SEND in their

learning. When these plans are used by teachers, they support pupils effectively to learn the intended curriculum. When the agreed approaches to support learning are not used, some pupils struggle to learn the curriculum.

The school's systems to support pupils at the earlier stages of reading are not fully developed. Support for the small number of Year 7 pupils who lack secure phonics knowledge has been implemented very recently in the spring term, meaning these pupils did not have the reading support they needed at the start of the school year.

Pupils benefit from an exceptionally well-constructed taught personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) programme. The programme skilfully combines provision from subjects, including religious studies, extended form time and assemblies. This supports pupils to develop a rich understanding of the world around them. Pupils are able to speak confidently about issues such as democracy, protected characteristics and the role that faith plays in people's lives in the context of their own community and beyond. Pupils, including those with SEND, who require additional support to develop this crucial understanding receive it through highly effective additional small-group discussions and, where necessary, bespoke one-to-one sessions. Pupils benefit from a strong careers education from the start of Year 7. They develop strong knowledge of the various options open to them post-16 and post-18, as well as a wide range of potential careers.

An extensive extra-curricular offer provides pupils with the opportunity to develop existing interests and explore new ones. The school carefully monitors attendance at clubs and societies. Where pupils need support to attend, they receive it. Within the sixth form, the majority of the wide range of groups are student led. For example, students in the sixth-form coding group research developments in coding, far beyond the taught curriculum, and present their findings to their peers.

Following return to normal schooling after COVID-19, the school noticed that the behaviour of some pupils was more challenging than previously. Strong pastoral care allowed leaders to implement bespoke support for those most in need. Leaders made well-judged adjustments to behaviour systems. These supported staff to improve behaviour without undermining the warm, harmonious ethos of the school. Following an initial increase in suspensions, bespoke support for those most in need has been highly effective at changing behaviours and allowing them to be successful.

Leaders, including governors, have clearly identified the areas of school they wish to enhance further. Recently, leadership structures have been adjusted to ensure that key aspects of provision are not solely led by an individual member of staff. This is providing appropriate additional internal challenge, and support, for leaders as they seek to provide the very highest standard of education for all pupils. Plans for improvement, however, have not always focused closely enough on the impact of changes being made. In some areas, this has limited the ability of leaders to identify where further adjustments need to take place.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The support plans in place for pupils with SEND are not always used routinely by teachers to provide the support that pupils need to be successful in lessons. As a result, sometimes pupils with SEND struggle in lessons and do not learn the intended curriculum. Leaders should ensure that pupils consistently receive the support identified within their plans.
- A small number of pupils who have gaps in their phonological knowledge do not always quickly receive the support they need, when joining the school. As a result, they may struggle with decoding unfamiliar vocabulary. Leaders should ensure that pupils who need support with their reading get the precise support they need, at the time they need it.
- Leaders do not always precisely evaluate the impact of their actions to improve aspects of provision. As a result, some areas of school are not improving as quickly as leaders would want because they are not able to identify where they need to refine the actions being taken. Leaders should ensure that actions taken to improve school are carefully evaluated against clear impact related success criteria so adjustments can be made, where necessary.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

## Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114312
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10346302
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1689
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	351
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Sandra Whitton
<b>Acting Headteacher</b>	Rosslyn McFadden
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.durhamjohnston.org.uk">www.durhamjohnston.org.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	11 and 12 February 2015 under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The acting headteacher has been in post since the start of this academic year. Previously she was the deputy headteacher in school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils receiving SEND support, or who have education, health and care plans is much lower than the national average.
- The school sixth form is much larger than the average-school sixth form nationally. Around one third of the pupils in the sixth form joined from other schools at the start of Year 12.

- The school makes use of nine alternative providers, two are registered. All pupils currently attending alternative provision full time attend a registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## **Information about this inspection**

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with a range of staff including the acting headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, teaching staff and staff working in a range of other roles in the school.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: mathematics, religious studies, science, geography and business studies. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupil work with leaders. Inspectors also visited lessons and spoke with subject leaders in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, staff and pupils. In addition, inspectors spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally and held discussions with a wide range of staff.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documents provided by the school and information available on the school website.

## **Inspection team**

Steve Wren, lead inspector

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