

Dixons Free Sixth Form

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Charles Searle, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: 16–19 free school

Address: Douglas Mill
Bowling Old Lane
Bradford
BD5 7JR

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of education programmes for young people within the further education and skills sector. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Dixons Free Sixth Form is part of the Dixons Academic Charitable Trust, which has a growing number of schools in Bradford, Leeds and other northern cities. The sixth form began operating in September 2019. It currently has 965 students studying 22 A levels and four applied vocational qualifications. The most popular A levels are biology, chemistry, mathematics, psychology and sociology.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant education programmes that have a clearly defined purpose? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have created an ambitious academic and vocational curriculum that enables students from some of the poorest communities in the city of Bradford to achieve their aspiration to go to university. They have responded swiftly and effectively to the demand for access to this curriculum by significantly increasing the number of places available to students since the sixth form began operating two years ago.

Leaders and managers have recruited staff who are well qualified in their fields. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this in a skilful way to teach the curriculum. For example, in health and social care, teachers draw on their vocational experience to support students' understanding of the clinical and professional terminology that students need to use when caring for patients.

Managers and teachers monitor the progress of students very effectively throughout their time at the sixth form. Teachers and progress tutors work well together to identify any students who are at risk of not meeting their target grades. They organise structured self-study and one-to-one sessions to prevent students from falling behind.

Staff provide students with good advice and guidance about their next steps through the content of courses and in tutorials. Tutors prepare students fully for interviews for university admission. This has helped to enable most of the first cohort of

students recruited since the sixth form was established to progress into higher education.

Members of the local governing board are curious and inquisitive about the performance of students. They use board meetings particularly well to hold senior leaders to account for their actions and challenge them to continue to improve the quality of the teaching that students experience. For example, they interrogate data on students' destinations and suggest ways that senior leaders can increase the numbers of students going to the most prestigious universities.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality education programmes for young people that prepare them well for their intended job role, career aim and/or personal goals? **Significant progress**

Managers and teachers have a very clear rationale for the curriculum. For example, the A-level history course enables students to develop the skills and knowledge that universities welcome, particularly the ability to collect, analyse and present information that can be used in careers such as law, journalism, economics and politics.

Teachers establish the starting points of students highly accurately and use this information to set challenging but attainable grades. Many students complete research projects during the summer break before they start at the sixth form. Teachers use these to assess the level of the students' prior knowledge of their subjects and their aptitude for independent study.

Teachers plan and teach the curriculum in a carefully considered way that enables students to build their knowledge and skills coherently over time. For example, in the early stages of A-level economics, students learn about supply and demand, and how human behaviours affect economic outcomes. This learning becomes the fundamental building block for the understanding of more challenging concepts later in the curriculum.

Staff use assessment very effectively to check students' understanding and adapt the curriculum where needed to embed concepts that students find difficult. Biology teachers revisit work in the session and carry out weekly assessments. As a result, students have a good recall of the content of the curriculum.

Teachers set high expectations for the requirement of students to undertake homework and return written assignments on time. As a result, students sustain a good level of progress throughout their courses.

Teachers provide students with effective support to improve and refine their writing skills. For example, in A-level history, teachers demonstrate to students from an

early stage on the course how to organise and present written arguments. Students become more fluent writers by redrafting essays or practising how to write introductions and summaries.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers implement a rigorous set of procedures that adhere to the trust's safeguarding policies, such as the safe recruitment of staff.

Designated safeguarding leads are experienced and appropriately trained to fulfil their roles. They know their students well. They identify when students have concerns and act quickly to provide them with effective support. Designated safeguarding leads are quick to respond and deal with the very few reported instances of sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

Governors and senior leaders have effective oversight over safeguarding incidents and the implementation of new policies and procedures.

Students in the second year of their course cannot recall having discussed topics such as consent and how to maintain healthy relationships through the tutorial programme, where the priority was on preparing them for university. Managers have recognised this and have increased the time available for tutorials and invested in additional staffing, so that all students cover these topics by the end of the first year.

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Piccadilly Gate
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