

James Calvert Spence College - South Avenue

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122349
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359230
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2012
Lead inspector	James Kidd

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle Deemed Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	405
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hall
Headteacher	Christine Graham
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

James Kidd

David Griffiths

Frank Cain

Additional inspector

Additional inspector

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 24 lessons or part-lessons, taught by 23 teachers. Meetings were held with students from all year groups, two members of the governing body, parents and carers, a representative of the local authority, faculty heads and other senior staff. Inspectors also looked at the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) but no responses were recorded. They observed the school's work, and looked at students' workbooks, progress and attainment data, school improvement planning, local authority reports and documentation in relation to safeguarding and child protection. Inspectors also took account of 99 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 31 completed by staff and 49 returned by students

Information about the school

This school contains students from Years 5 to 8 and, because it is deemed to be a secondary school, is much smaller than schools of the same type. It serves a mixed area and is federated with the former Coquet High School, now James Calvert Spence College, Acklington Road. It has been in existence since September 2011, when two middle schools amalgamated on the South Avenue site. On exit from Year 8, most students enter Year 9 on the Acklington Road site. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The percentage of students supported at school action and school action plus is well above that usually found, but there is a below-average number with a statement of special educational needs. Almost all students are of White British heritage and there are no students who speak English as an additional language. Both sections of the federated college share the same senior leadership structure and the same governing body. The executive headteacher leads both schools within the college. Since the school opened only five months ago, there is no nationally-published data about students' performance over the past three years in relation to government floor standards.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- This school provides a satisfactory, but improving, quality of education for its students. Attainment by the end of Year 8 is below average overall, particularly in English, but this represents satisfactory achievement given students' below and often well-below average standards on entry to Year 5. The progress of students in all groups and in all years is beginning to accelerate. The school recognises, for example, that it needs to build on the successes of the 'Enquiry Learning' programme of projects and problem-solving if attainment, particularly in English, is to continue to rise.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall, but it is improving strongly and securely and there are examples of good practice in several areas. Teaching in Year 6 is a particular strength. However, there is a lack of consistency in teaching quality across the school. For example, an insufficient number of lessons comprise activities which are closely aligned to students' particular interests and experiences and which ensure that they are fully engaged in their learning.
- Students, parents and carers make positive comments about the marked improvements over time in students' conduct in lessons and around school. Most students behave sensibly in lessons. They comment that incidences of bullying are now fewer than at the time of the amalgamation and that the school deals with any bullying rapidly and effectively.
- The perceptive executive headteacher leads by example and is supported by an industrious and talented senior team. There is now a clear and shared vision for how the school should develop further and actions for improvement are founded on an honest and accurate self-evaluation of performance in all areas of its life. Leaders are aware that continued emphases on the embedding of agreed school policies and procedures and on the effective use of rigorous data analysis are of the essence if students' achievement is to improve further.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment, particularly in English, by:
 - providing students with more opportunities to reinforce their speaking, listening and writing skills in all subjects of the curriculum
 - building on the successes of the 'Enquiry Learning' programme to prepare students more effectively for reading and to motivate them to want to read independently.

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching by:
 - sharing good practice in teaching across the school
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessment informs teachers' planning effectively and leads to students receiving work which meets their individual learning needs more closely
 - developing teachers' questioning skills further to ensure that challenge is realistic for all groups of students
 - ensuring that marking in all classes is as good as the best and gives students detailed advice on how they can improve their work
 - providing more activities in lessons which are closely related to students' experiences and interests and which engage them more fully in their learning.

- Enhance the impact of leaders and managers further at all levels by:
 - ensuring that staff follow and embed agreed school policies and procedures
 - continuing the rigorous analysis of progress and data and using the outcomes to promote improved achievement.

Main Report

Achievement of students

Generally, students enjoy their lessons and are often eager to learn. They enjoy talking about their work with visitors and are particularly proud to show them their handwriting. Indeed, students' handwriting and their neat presentation are impressive and demonstrate the pride they show in their work. When lessons are not closely linked to students' interests and experiences, the students are less engaged in the activities and can become passive in their learning.

On amalgamation, students' prior attainment in both literacy and numeracy was below average in all years. Attainment remains below average, but internal school data and inspection evidence demonstrate that the progress of all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and those with disabilities, is accelerating and is satisfactory overall in both English and mathematics. Progress in mathematics, particularly in Year 6, is accelerating at a faster rate than it is in English. Gaps in the performance of different groups, students known to be eligible for free school meals for example, are narrowing compared to all students nationally. Over 80% of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires are entirely satisfied with the progress their children are making and their view is justified given the improvements the school is making. As one parent commented,

'Considering the changes over the past year, I am pleased with the progress my children have made.'

By the end of Year 7, students' attainment in reading is below average and their levels of fluency are variable. There is a similar picture in Year 8, but intonation and understanding of text are a little better. Across the school, many students display an interest in reading independently and students in Year 5, for example, comment that they enjoy reading and read regularly at home. However, these levels of motivation in reading are not apparent in all years. The school has identified this as an area for development and has recently introduced reading into the 'Enquiry Learning' sessions, in order to prepare students more effectively for reading and to encourage them to want to read. Students' oral and communication skills and the quality of their writing vary from class to class and there are insufficient opportunities for them to practise and reinforce their speaking, listening and writing skills across the curriculum.

Quality of teaching

As a result of regular lesson observations and detailed feedback on teachers' performance in the classroom, teaching is improving steadily and good practice is evident in all years, but particularly in Year 6. The majority of questionnaires returned by parents and carers indicate that they are satisfied with the teaching their children receive. Their confidence in the quality of teaching is certainly justified. In the best lessons, a Year 6 mathematics session, for example, there is good pace in learning, warm relationships between students and between students and the adults supporting them and high expectations of what students can achieve. In such lessons, continuous assessment is accurate and of good quality and informs curriculum and lesson planning well. As a result, students are challenged realistically to reach the standards of which they are capable and all groups, including the more able and those who often find the work difficult, are nurtured and supported to do as well as they can. However, such effective assessment practice does not occur in all lessons and, as a result, the curriculum does not always provide students with work which meets their learning needs closely enough. This demonstrates that the quality of teaching remains inconsistent across the school. This has been recognised by the senior leadership, which is accurate in its view that the continued emphasis on the sharing of good practice, in workshops led by individual staff for example, is vital if greater consistency in the classroom is to be ensured.

In many classes, teachers use perceptive questioning to foster increased progress, but, in a minority of lessons, questioning is not effective enough to challenge students to think more deeply about the subject-matter and to justify their answers. Nonetheless, teaching has a satisfactory impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the 'Enquiry Learning' programme in particular emphasises to students the importance of thinking for themselves.

The quality of marking is generally good, but its extent, quality and impact are also inconsistent. The best practice is regular, accurate and comprises extensive comment on how students can improve their work. On occasions, marking is cursory, sometimes misses mistakes students have made and does not always include detailed information on how they can aim for higher standards. Nonetheless, a positive feature of marking in all classes is the emphasis placed on correct spelling.

Behaviour and safety of students

Discussion with students in all years demonstrates that they feel safe in school and, in their words, 'There are always adults we can talk to if we do not feel happy.' Indeed, assemblies encourage students to feel proud of their achievements and emphasise that the success of one student is the success and happiness of all. Students are of the view that conduct continues to improve, because the school takes behaviour seriously and because students are encouraged to see the consequences of their actions. The points systems, 'praise points' and 'behaviour points' are regarded highly and students believe both have a positive impact. Inspection evidence demonstrates that behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory overall and often good. It confirms also, however, that students, parents and carers are accurate in their view that there is still too much low-level misbehaviour in lessons, often not picked up effectively enough by staff, and that it sometimes leads to students distracting others, thus hindering their learning.

Students show an accurate understanding of the features and dangers of bullying in all its forms and add that the school, through assemblies and a range of anti-bullying initiatives, teaches them how to combat it. They are of the view and records confirm that incidences of bullying have reduced markedly over time and that they are now infrequent. They believe also that, when bullying occurs, the school deals with it rapidly and effectively. Parents and carers judge that their children are safe in school.

The school is very concerned to promote students' emotional well-being and monitors the personal development of all, including those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable, closely. The establishment of the 'Nurture Room' is just one example of how the school tries to meet the needs of all its charges. This area is regarded highly by those who attend it and it has a positive impact on how these students feel about themselves. The staff who administer the area treat the students with the utmost care and sensitivity. Attendance is broadly average and continues to improve as a result of close monitoring, improved communication with parents and carers through the school website and good links with the local Education Welfare Service.

Leadership and management

Extensive, accurate and honest self-evaluation and an overriding concern to improve the quality of teaching and learning as the foundation to increased student progress have resulted in continuous improvements in all areas of school life since the amalgamation. The well-informed executive headteacher leads by example and has, with the strong support of the increasingly empowered senior leadership team, produced challenging action plans for improvement which, in the words of parents and carers, ensure that 'The school is heading in the right direction.' Leaders do not rest on their laurels and they continue to insist that all staff follow agreed policies and procedures, monitor students' progress rigorously and use the data collected to promote ongoing improvements in students' achievement.

The monitoring and evaluation skills of heads of faculty and also of middle leaders are improving apace. Less experienced staff receive solid support and advice from their more experienced colleagues and continued professional development is used well to inform staff of the latest thinking on classroom practice. Staff are increasingly supportive of the leadership's clear vision for how the school is to improve, adding to its manifest capacity to improve.

The governing body is supportive of the school and provides good strategic direction for its development. It has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and also of its areas for improvement. It challenges the leadership with increasing rigour.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and the weekly enrichment initiative is popular among students, who comment 'We do new things and we also meet older students in other years.' There is also a good range of extra-curricular activities, including a variety of educational trips. Despite these features, the curriculum is satisfactory overall, because there are insufficient opportunities for students to reinforce their literacy skills in all subjects and because work is sometimes not matched closely enough to students' individual learning needs and to their interests and experiences. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although assemblies promote students' moral and social development well.

The school promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily and deals effectively with the rare incidences of discrimination. Safeguarding and child-protection procedures and practice are satisfactory, are reviewed regularly and meet national requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



18 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of James Calvert Spence College - South Avenue, Morpeth, NE65 0ND

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team so warmly when we visited your school recently. You were very friendly and polite to us and we enjoyed watching you learn. I am particularly grateful to those of you who gave of your time to talk to us on Monday lunchtime. South Avenue is a satisfactory school and it has improved a lot since the amalgamation last year. Although the standards you reach are below average overall, you are making satisfactory progress in your lessons, but you are not doing quite as well in English as you are in mathematics. Your behaviour is getting better and better and you told us that there is much less bullying in school now. You get on well with each other and with the adults who work with you. You look very smart in your uniforms and we know you are proud to wear them.

Your headteacher and all the other staff would like your school to improve even more quickly. I have asked them to do a few things which will help this to happen.

- I have asked them to improve your standards in English by giving you more opportunities to talk, listen and write in all your subjects. I have also mentioned that they should make sure that the 'Enquiry Learning' sessions prepare you well for reading and encourage you to read independently. You can obviously help here by reading as much as you can, not just when you are in lessons.
- I have asked them to improve the consistency of teaching across the school by making sure you receive the right kind of work, which you enjoy and which helps you make enough progress. I have also talked to them about the right questions to ask in class which challenge you to think and about making sure that marking always gives you detailed advice on how can improve your work.

Thank you again for your kindness and courtesy to us. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

James Kidd
Lead inspector

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