

Sir Thomas Wharton Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106787
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	377467
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Philip Jarrett HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,140
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Hilling
Headteacher	Mary McCorry
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 49 lessons, taught by 49 different teachers. They held meetings with groups of students, staff and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of other evidence including lesson plans, school policies, assessment data and case study files. They also looked at all the questionnaires completed by students and staff, and at the 145 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following questions.

- Whether the school has effective strategies in place to deal with previously underperforming groups of students.
- Whether progress is good enough in English and mathematics, and how well whole-school policies support the development of literacy and numeracy.
- Whether there is enough consistency across departments in teaching and in the use of assessment data.
- Whether previous difficulties with behaviour have been resolved successfully.

Information about the school

Sir Thomas Wharton College is a larger than average foundation school for students aged 11-18. Most students are of White British background. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. There is an above average proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has a specialism in business and enterprise education. It re-opened in new buildings and with a new name in 2009. The school recently converted to a Co-operative Trust with two other local secondary schools and works in collaboration with these schools to provide courses for sixth-form students. The school has received a number of awards including the Arts Mark Gold, Healthy Schools' award, the Sports Mark, and Investors in People.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Sir Thomas Wharton College is a school that has improved considerably in recent years. This is the result of determined and thoughtful leadership, together with a strong whole-staff commitment to improving outcomes for students. The staff have created an orderly school community with a positive learning ethos. There has been a rigorous emphasis on teaching and learning. As a result, teaching and learning have improved although more remains to be done. The school has many strengths. The curriculum is now well-matched to the needs of students and is substantially enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. Care, guidance and support are good. Students feel safe in the school, there is very little evidence of bullying, and relationships are positive.

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory because, despite substantial improvements in attainment over recent years, the progress made by most students, including those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those in the sixth form, is satisfactory. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average although many students struggle in key areas of literacy and numeracy. Attainment rose again at the end of Key Stage 4 last year and is now broadly in line with the national average. Current school assessments, including the results of examination modules already taken, suggest that this is likely to continue. GCSE results in English and mathematics have improved although the proportion of students making expected progress in these subjects remains below average. Attainment in the sixth form has also improved, although it remains below average partly due to variable achievement across subjects.

Students overall make satisfactory progress because teaching remains variable. Senior leaders have spent a considerable amount of time working to enhance teaching and much of this work has been successful. There are good opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other. However, weaknesses in the consistency of teaching limit students' progress in a small minority of lessons. These weaknesses include: lack of clarity over learning objectives; a failure to check students' understanding at key moments in lessons; and weaknesses in planning for the wide range of ability across classes. Students state that behaviour has improved. This is certainly the case. Nevertheless, learning slowed on a number of occasions in lessons observed as a result of some teachers struggling to manage low-level misbehaviour.

Recent improvements are the result of committed and effective leadership and management. The headteacher provides a clear vision and strong direction to the school's work. Senior leaders know the school well and have tackled previous weaknesses with considerable success. They are aware of what needs to be done and the capacity for further improvement is good.

Up to 40% of the 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?

- Establish the consistency of good teaching and learning by improving:
 - the effectiveness of learning objectives in lesson plans
 - the quality of planning to meet the learning needs of different groups of students in lessons
 - the management of behaviour in lessons where students' learning is disrupted
 - teachers' monitoring of students' learning during lessons.
- Improve students' progress in English and mathematics through continuing support for teaching in these areas and through whole-school strategies to develop literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.
- Raise standards in the sixth form to be at least satisfactory in those subjects the school has already identified as performing less well than others.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment has been rising strongly and is broadly average at the end of Key Stage 4. The school has identified some under-performance from a few groups of students, including boys and students who are known to be eligible for free school meals. Action is leading to improvement and the gap between girls' and boys' achievement closed last year. Learning and progress were satisfactory overall in lessons observed. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive high levels of support within lessons and this enables them to make progress in line with that of other students. Students are keen to learn and work hard when the quality of teaching is high. They ask questions and concentrate well when interested. They collaborate well in small groups. Some students tend to rely too much on their teachers and the school is seeking to improve their confidence in working independently. Weaknesses in important aspects of literacy and numeracy sometimes limit progress in lessons.

Students behave well around the school and show good respect for other people and for the environment. Behaviour is good in a large majority of lessons. However, a small minority of students, parents, carers and staff expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspection evidence confirms that most students arrive at lessons keen to learn and to behave well. However, where teaching or classroom management show weaknesses, some students lose concentration and learning is disturbed.

The school works hard to promote healthy living and this is recognised by most students. A large number of students take part in sporting activities, school meals have become more healthy, and there are frequent reminders to students about the importance of a good diet and regular exercise. Most students enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in improved attendance. A systematic programme of assembly and tutorial themes makes a positive contribution to students' personal development, including their spiritual development. A good range of creative experiences in the curriculum and beyond aids students' cultural awareness.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school's monitoring identifies some variability in the quality of teaching. In the most effective lessons, teachers are energetic and lively. Their good subject knowledge and enthusiasm engage students. In these lessons, teachers use varied resources and approaches to motivate students. Most teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to deliver their lessons and relationships are strong. As noted earlier, learning declines when behaviour is allowed to deteriorate. In weaker lessons, planning is not always effective enough in identifying or monitoring learning in lessons or in challenging groups of different abilities. Students are made aware of the next steps in their learning. The best marking is helpful and well-targeted although this is not consistent across the school.

The curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of experiences, and contributes positively to students' well-being. The different pathways provided at Key Stage 4 meet students' varied needs well. Good partnership arrangements with other schools and the local college enhance opportunities for learning. The curriculum is further strengthened by a well-planned and rigorous programme for personal, social, health, and citizenship education. The school's approach to the curriculum is inclusive. Few students are withdrawn from lessons. Instead, resources are deployed to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access the mainstream

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

curriculum. This contributed to the school’s success last year in enabling every student to achieve at least one GCSE. There is good take-up of the wide range of enrichment activities provided.

Students have good relationships with staff and feel well cared for. An effective house system gives them a strong sense of belonging. Most students enjoy being in tutor groups where there are students of different ages (vertical tutor groups) and this has helped to improve behaviour and provide a welcoming environment. The appointment of non-teaching pastoral heads gives students ready access to support and guidance, and this is supplemented by a number of successful student mentoring schemes. Transition arrangements are good and new Year 7 students settle in very quickly. Rigorous monitoring and effective reward systems have contributed to improvements in attendance. Particularly good support has been provided for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

Senior leaders are highly focused on improving teaching and outcomes for learners. All aspects of the school have improved over recent years. As a result, the school is now well-regarded in the community and by a very large majority of parents and carers. The dedicated headteacher and other senior leaders work well together. Strategic planning is imaginative and well-considered. Recent changes to the staff structure have been thoughtfully introduced to prepare the school for future changes in national education policy. Partnerships have been sought with other schools and these benefit learning well. There is a strong ambition for further improvement.

Teaching and learning are at the centre of the school’s improvement strategy. This has been promoted by an imaginative range of approaches including a well-managed coaching programme, the work of a teaching and learning group, and opportunities for teachers to share practice on a regular basis. Monitoring is systematic and thorough. As a result, senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching throughout the school. While teaching has improved, some variability in quality continues to affect students’ progress.

The governing body strongly supports the school but also challenges and questions decisions. It is directly involved in setting the strategic direction and has a good understanding of what needs to be done to raise attainment. Middle managers often provide good leadership, supported by systematic and helpful development plans. The school has a number of strategies for promoting students’ understanding of the local and wider community although the school recognises some weaknesses in the explicit planning for, and evaluation of, community cohesion.

Safeguarding is good. There are strengths in teaching about e-safety and the security of the site. Policies are clear and compliant, and child protection officers are knowledgeable and committed. Record-keeping is secure with good links between tutors and other pastoral staff.

These are the grades for the 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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Arriving with below average levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress. Achievement has improved and higher-attaining students do well. Retention rates and attendance have also improved. Students are guided well in their transition into the sixth form. Students develop good leadership skills, through their involvement in Sports Leadership awards and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. They take key roles in the school council as well as mentoring younger students and providing support in the vertical-grouped tutor sessions.

The school has identified a number of subjects where students achieve less well and action is currently being taken to improve outcomes in these areas. Improvements have taken place in subjects including mathematics and ICT. The best teaching engages students through good pace, effective use of pair work and strong subject knowledge. Where learning is less effective, lessons tend to be too teacher-directed with slow pace and students lose interest. Care, guidance and support are good, especially at key transition points. Students are well-prepared for future employment or further study. Partnership arrangements in the sixth form enable students to choose from a wide range of courses.

Leaders and managers are tackling weaknesses in teaching and progress. The curriculum is being usefully extended to include more vocational courses. There is good monitoring of learning across the partnership schools. Sixth-form plans identify the right priority areas for development although evaluation strategies are less clear. Overall, the capacity for further improvement in the sixth form is good. There is a trend of improving progress and systems are beginning to have a positive impact on students' outcomes although there remain a number of subjects where progress is not yet strong enough.

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

A very large majority of parents and carers are very happy with their children’s experience at school. Most believe that their children enjoy coming to school and are kept safe. They express confidence in the leadership of the school and agree that they are kept informed about their children’s progress. Most parents and carers are also very happy about the extent to which the school meets the particular needs of their children. Most parents and carers believe that teaching is good and that students make good progress. The inspection broadly endorsed these views.

A very small minority of parents and carers expressed some anxieties about poor behaviour. The team observed behaviour in lessons and around the school, had discussions with staff and students, and scrutinised behavioural records. The team believes that behaviour has improved but that low-level misbehaviour does slow progress in some lessons.

A few parents and carers thought that the school could do more to promote healthy living and to help them support their children’s learning. The inspection team judges that the school has already done a considerable amount to promote healthy living. The Friends of the School hold regular meetings to involve parents more in order to help them support learning in the school. Attendance has improved at these meetings although there are still many parents and carers who choose not to attend.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sir Thomas Wharton Community College 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 **145** completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,140 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	44	72	50	6	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	60	41	74	51	7	5	3	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	56	39	78	54	7	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	40	71	49	10	7	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	46	32	82	57	11	8	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	30	79	54	14	10	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	19	96	66	15	10	4	3
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)	38	26	87	60	6	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	43	30	87	60	9	6	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	23	84	58	14	10	9	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	25	82	57	15	10	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	44	30	81	56	9	6	7	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	57	39	73	50	10	7	4	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 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and is 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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100. Sixth-form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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 pupils' 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.



7 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir Thomas Wharton Community College, Doncaster

My colleagues and I enjoyed meeting you during the recent school inspection. You told us that you feel safe in school and that bullying is very rare. You appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided and most of you like the new arrangements for vertical tutor groups. Your relationships with other students and with the teachers are good. You respect each other and the school environment. Many of you told us how much you like the new school buildings and we are not surprised by that. They are quite special! Most of you said that behaviour is now good. However, a small number of students expressed concerns about behaviour and we did observe some lessons where low-level misbehaviour interfered with learning.

You are cared for well and know who to talk to if problems arise. The curriculum provides a good range of different courses to meet your needs. The school is led well. As a result, standards have risen. The school is now well-regarded in the community. Overall, we judged the school to be satisfactory and improving. Attainment is now broadly average. However, teaching is variable in quality and we have suggested some ways in which it might be made more consistently good. We have also said that the school should try to improve standards in English and mathematics and that all staff can help by promoting literacy and numeracy in their lessons.

The sixth form has improved but the school knows that achievement in some subjects is not as good as in others. We have asked the school to try to ensure that all subjects perform equally well in the sixth form.

Once again, it was really good to meet you and speak with you in the inspection.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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