



The Community Science College at Thornhill

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 107777
Local Authority Kirklees
Inspection number 287912
Inspection dates 14–15 February 2007
Reporting inspector Jean Kendall HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Valley Drive
School category	Community		Thornhill, Dewsbury
Age range of pupils	11–16		West Yorkshire WF12 0HE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01924 324890
Number on roll (school)	768	Fax number	01924 324892
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Mark Rowan
		Headteacher	Mr David Powell
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	14–15 February 2007	287912

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Community Science College at Thornhill is a specialist science and mathematics college serving the communities of Thornhill and Savile Town. The college is slightly smaller than average and three quarters of the students are from White British families. The majority of other students are of British Asian origin with English as an additional language, although very few students are in the early stages of English language development. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average. The college has achieved the SportsMark and the silver level ArtsMark. It is part of the Kirklees Collegiate programme designed to extend opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds. It has an on-site inclusion centre offering alternative provision for students having difficulties in mainstream lessons.

The college is currently being led by an acting headteacher in the long term absence of the headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Community Science College at Thornhill provides a satisfactory standard of education and gives satisfactory value for money. The capacity to make further improvement is satisfactory. The headteacher and college manager have been absent from duty for some months and the college is running smoothly under the temporary leadership of the acting headteacher and senior leadership team. They have a strong commitment to improving the college and a sound understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Staff share the commitment to improving the quality of provision and raising standards. Nevertheless, the lack of permanence in the senior leadership team is a continuing source of potential instability. Before its next Section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor progress.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and a significant amount of teaching has good features. Students' attitudes and behaviour are largely positive, although pockets of disruptive behaviour still hinder progress in some classes where teaching is less inspiring. Standards are below average but most students make satisfactory progress given their low attainment on entry to the college. Although overall achievement is satisfactory, college leaders are clear that a few students are underachieving and that better use of assessment and more effective teaching is needed if all students are to make the progress of which they are capable. Effective self-review systems have been put in place to monitor the performance of students and staff in some departments, but these are not consistently used across the whole college. Performance targets, including science targets set as part of the specialist college status, have been missed but tracking of students' progress and current standards indicate that the college is on course to achieve better in 2007.

What the school should do to improve further

- Governors, with the support of the local authority, need to ensure that the lack of permanence within the leadership team is resolved as soon as possible.
- Improve the quality of all teaching and learning to match the good practice that exists within the college.
- Use the information gained from assessing students more effectively to tackle underachievement.
- Strengthen the arrangements for self-evaluation and spreading good practice between departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average but most students make satisfactory progress given their low attainment on entry to the college. Whilst overall achievement is satisfactory, a few students are underachieving. At Key Stage 3 students achieve well in mathematics but their progress in English fluctuates year on year. In science, the turbulence caused by staff being promoted out of the college has had a detrimental effect on standards.

Recent appointments, together with additional support from the senior leadership team, are beginning to bring about improvements and most students are now making satisfactory progress.

Standards at GCSE are below the national average and there is variation in students' progress across Years 10 and 11. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE dipped in 2006. This is partly explained by the high rate of absenteeism by students who joined the college in Years 10 and 11. Staffing difficulties also led to underachievement in science at GCSE, with a fifth of students achieving below their predicted grade. Students of Gujarati Indian descent make better progress than their peers and proportionately more achieve five or more A* to C grades. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive satisfactory support and make reasonable progress. College leaders are acting to address underachievement and there are signs that measures put in place are beginning to improve standards of work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' social and moral development is satisfactory. Attitudes and behaviour are largely positive, in class and around college. This is in part a response to effective teaching and learning, but also reflects the influence of a rigorous and predictable scheme of rewards and sanctions that has been recently adopted. Pockets of disruptive behaviour still hinder progress in some classes and some students are too passive or easily distracted, especially when teaching is uninspiring. Many students are starting to benefit from working towards negotiated targets and tracking their own progress. Many appreciate the rewards they get for good effort and achievement.

Students feel safe in college and relatively free from bullying, although many parents express concern about the overall level of discipline. Inspectors did not observe any instances of bullying or aggressive behaviour. Satisfactory spiritual and cultural development is evident in tolerant and harmonious relations within the college. Despite the college's strenuous efforts, attendance has fallen to below average, largely due to a few persistent absentees. Students are developing healthy lifestyles, eating sensibly and looking forward to improved sports facilities. They appreciate the contributions they can make to the life of the college as librarians, prefects and college council members. Their acquisition of workplace skills is enhanced through vocational and work-related learning but there are too few opportunities for independent and cooperative learning in some lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and enable most students to make satisfactory progress: a significant amount of teaching has good features. However, the

preponderance of satisfactory teaching and the lack of good teaching in some areas represent barriers to raising standards and improving students' rates of progress. This can be seen, for example in science, particularly in lower ability classes, where students do not achieve as well as they should.

Where teaching is good, lessons are planned carefully and students understand what they must do to improve and achieve well. The good pace in these lessons and engagement of students through effective questioning and interesting activities, make sure that students are challenged, stay on task and learn well. In lessons where teaching is less effective, students make slower progress. Here, explanations lack clarity, activities lack challenge and interest, students are unclear about the purpose of the lesson and poor behaviour management restricts learning.

The rigorous use of data and information about students' progress is a growing strength and where used effectively, for example in design and technology and mathematics, it informs teachers and helps learners. Most students know their target grades and in some lessons assess their own work or that of others and gain a deeper understanding of their studies. However, these features are not yet consistent across all departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. It is improving and has some good features. The needs of students are met effectively by providing a wide and well-balanced programme, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped by a curriculum that is tailored to meet their needs. Vocational subjects offer increased choices that interest students, lead to recognised qualifications to use at the next stage of their education, and respond to local needs. Potentially disaffected students enjoy work-based learning for part of the week and can still gain essential qualifications in English, mathematics and other subjects. Work-related learning provision is good. The college's specialist science status has brought extra resources which have widened opportunities and strengthened links with other colleges and the local community. However, significant staffing problems in science have reduced the impact upon standards and achievement in the subject. The range of extra clubs and activities is good: they are enjoyed by many students whose achievement and personal development are boosted by their participation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Most students feel valued and they know who to turn to if they need help. Child protection systems and thorough safety checks on new staff and visitors fully meet the latest national requirements. Suitable accident and medical administration systems and procedures are in place as are risk assessments for both the college site and regular external visits. College staff and a wide range of multi-agency professionals provide significant pastoral and learning support to a number of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students' understanding of how well they are doing is satisfactory but academic

guidance and support needs to improve further. The college recognises that its relatively new assessment strategies have some way to go before they are used consistently across the college.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The college has been in a period of relative turbulence and the headteacher and college manager have been absent from duty for some months. The acting headteacher and senior leadership team are making satisfactory progress in moving the college forward. They are committed to improving the quality of provision and raising standards and have a sound understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders recognise that more can be done to improve achievement and to strengthen the way performance is checked. They are putting appropriate measures in place to monitor students' progress and tackle underachievement. Recent developments in the monitoring of teaching and learning and departmental self-review are beginning to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is too early to assess the longer term impact of these developments on standards and students' achievement.

The college is inclusive in terms of ensuring equality of opportunity for every student, as exemplified by the positive work of the on-site inclusion centre. However, not all students across the college achieve what they are capable of. Members of the governing body are hard working and take an active interest in the life of the college. They have a growing understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and provide satisfactory challenge and support to the acting headteacher and staff. The college gives satisfactory value for money.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us into the College and sharing with us your views about your work and life there. Those of you we talked to were helpful and polite and are a credit to your college. You told us that you enjoy most aspects of your college and you appreciate the time teachers spend on out-of-school activities. You also told us that you feel safe and well cared for. We found your teachers to be supportive and committed to helping you develop the personal and academic skills you need to help you get on well in life. We were impressed by the way most of you are working with your teachers to improve behaviour and make sure everyone can get on with their work. Most of you behaved very well when we were in college.

We saw a lot of lessons and many that were good. We found that, although most of you work hard, some of you do not always achieve as well as you could. This is because some lessons fail to motivate you and the teaching is not always well matched to your needs. We have asked your teachers to work together to make all lessons as interesting and challenging as the best ones. We have also asked them to give you more detailed feedback on the quality of your work so that you can be clear about what you need to do to improve it. We think this will help you to take more responsibility for your own learning and help you do better in your work. You will need to work with your teachers to ensure this happens.