



Walker Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108525
Local Authority Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number 288125
Inspection dates 11–12 January 2007
Reporting inspector Brian Blake HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Middle Street
School category	Community		Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear
Age range of pupils	11–18		NE6 4BY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 2620911
Number on roll (school)	1219	Fax number	0191 2636758
Number on roll (6th form)	140		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	CLlr David Wood
		Headteacher	Dr Steve Gater
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	11–12 January 2007	288125

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Walker Technology College has dual specialist status in technology and visual arts, and is larger than most secondary schools. The area that the school serves has high levels of social deprivation. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage, with around five per cent from a range of different minority ethnic groups; of these, almost three per cent have English as an additional language. The numbers of students with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those eligible for free school meals, are significantly higher than found nationally.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Walker Technology College is a good school. It is very well-established within the local community, and is seen by the vast majority of parents as a caring school where the students are respected and where they do well. This happens because the school values highly its students and parents, and teachers do all they reasonably can to ensure that Walker provides a safe and happy environment that encourages young people to attend regularly and want to achieve the best they can. However, there is a small but hard core of poor and non-attendees, which presents an on-going challenge for the school. Senior managers are alert to this issue and are working effectively to improve the overall attendance rate. Other challenges arise from the levels of local deprivation, but committed teachers and good quality leadership and management are helping to tackle successfully some of these long-standing issues.

Students start at the school with well below average standards. Although standards remain below those expected at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9), primarily because of weak literacy and numeracy skills, the overall progress that students make throughout their time at school is good and students reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11). Although improving slowly, standards in mathematics remain a concern.

The school's support for the personal development and well-being of its students is good. Behaviour around the school and in the lessons observed is good, although some parents feel that this aspect could be better. The vast majority of students participate willingly in their learning; they work collaboratively, listen well and show respect to teachers and other students.

Teaching and learning are good, but in some lessons there is insufficient match between the learning activity and the needs of all students. Students have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development in some, but not all subjects. The curriculum is good and is meeting the diverse needs of students.

Overall care, guidance and support are good. All requirements to ensure that students are safe from harm are followed and applied rigorously by staff. The vast majority of students enjoy school, and feel well supported to do the best that they can. The strong house system provides good quality support for students, and results in very positive and trusting relationships.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good. Learners make good progress in relation to their starting point and achieve well. Although standards remain below the national average, there have been improvements over the past three years. Learners achieve particularly well at AS level.

The sixth form is committed to providing for the curricular needs of a wide range of learners. There are clear and appropriate pathways into further education, training

and employment. The curriculum is good. A broad range of advanced level courses, together with a wide range of vocational and accredited basic skills courses, is meeting the diverse needs of learners. As a result, most complete courses successfully.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' secure knowledge of their subjects enables them to plan challenging and stimulating activities. Learners appreciate opportunities to work independently, and in pairs and groups. In some lessons, however, opportunities to discuss work are not structured well enough, with the result that learners do not gain maximum benefit in developing their subject confidence and understanding. Learners know how well they are performing in relation to their target grades agreed with form tutors. Learners mostly understand what they must do to improve in each of their courses but this is not formalised and there is some inconsistency between subjects. Learners appreciate the extra support they receive from teachers in out-of-school hours.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Clear systems for evaluating the effectiveness of provision are in place, and there is a strong commitment to ensuring that learners receive good support and achieve well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics.
- Ensure that learning activities are well matched to different needs in all lessons so that all students are challenged to do their best.
- Improve the guidance that staff give to students so that they know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good and standards broadly average.

Students' standards when they start school in Year 7 are well below average. They make good progress overall, and an average proportion of students leave school with five or more grade A* to C passes at GCSE. The pace of progress is more rapid in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. This is, in part, because the courses available to students at Key Stage 4 are better matched to their needs and interests, and so most students remain well motivated and achieve well.

Many students start school with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Standards in English remain below average at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level, but the students achieve well overall. Students do not achieve as well they should in mathematics. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE remain weak. The school has recognised this and much has been done to improve the teaching and curriculum arrangements so that current students are making more rapid progress.

The school sets ambitious targets for GCSE and Key Stage 3 national tests. These were broadly met in 2005, but not in 2006. Targets relating to the school's specialist status in design and technology were exceeded at Key Stage 3 and met at GCSE.

There are no significant differences between the achievements of girls and boys, or students from different minority ethnic groups. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. They are well supported, especially where they work in small teaching groups. Those students learning English as an additional language are well supported and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. The school works effectively to ensure the safety of its students by acting quickly to address any bullying and racist behaviour that occurs.

Awareness of improving health outcomes is good, with a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities encouraging regular exercise, and school meals that emphasise healthy eating. There are numerous opportunities for students to contribute to the life of the school, through house councils, the student council, and the recently formed executive student council. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well in personal development and religious education lessons. There is good careers advice available, with enterprise and life skills contributing successfully to the economic well-being of students.

There is an effective system of rewards and sanctions. Attendance for the vast majority of students is satisfactory overall and is improving; it is good in the sixth form. There is, however, a small minority of persistent non-attendees that bring the overall attendance rate to well below the national average. This continues to present a major challenge, but a rigorous system of pursuing non-attendees is helping the school to successfully exceed its targets for improvement set by the Department for Education and Skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. In most lessons, students make good progress as a result of good teaching. Teachers make learning objectives clear, and lessons are well planned to include the use of suitably challenging tasks and thought-provoking questions.

In the very best lessons, teachers maintain a good pace to learning and have high expectations of what students will achieve. They use technology effectively to interest students and help their learning. In some lessons, however, learning activities are not well matched to students' different needs. This is because ongoing assessment is not used sufficiently well to inform subsequent lesson planning, and learning activities and outcomes are not sufficiently differentiated for the full ability range within the class.

In some subjects, students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and specifically what they need to do to improve; for example, in English and geography. This good practice is not yet consistent across all subjects and, as a result, a number of students are not clear about what is required in order to achieve the next stage in their learning. Many lessons pay good attention to improving students' basic skills in literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) but this is not yet the case in all subjects and is underdeveloped in numeracy.

Students identified 'in need of support', including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, receive good support from specialist teachers, teaching assistants and mentors, and make good progress overall.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good and enhanced by the school's specialist college status in design and technology, and by its recently acquired further specialism in the visual arts. The overall provision is complemented by a wide range of enrichment activities, within which a large number of students take advantage of the various sporting activities, clubs, educational visits and residential opportunities on offer.

Although the Key Stage 3 curriculum generally meets the needs of students, there is insufficient time for mathematics. At Key Stage 4, curriculum design is innovative and aims to meet the needs of all students, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those at greatest risk of disengaging from their education. Three learning pathways are providing strong links into further education, employment or training. The move towards a broader range of vocational subjects, in addition to a wide range of academic subjects, is proving popular and well suited to the needs and aspirations of students. There is a wide range of accredited courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 which are delivered in school and in partnership with local further education colleges, businesses, community groups and other agencies. These curriculum initiatives are contributing to the school's overall performance, and are helping to foster positive attitudes and increased attendance from students less suited to more traditional GCSE and GCE A level courses.

The curriculum is under constant review, and the school is aware of the weaknesses in its current provision. An even more innovative curriculum has been developed for 2007 that aims to address shortcomings, including the time allocation for mathematics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Teachers show a high level of professional interest and concern for the all-round welfare of students. The house system, which is a strength, is very well-established, well-known and very much appreciated by students. Affiliation to their pastoral house is very strong among the students, the vast majority of whom welcome the links that they have with house staff.

Students trust teachers and feel safe in school. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities towards the students, including how to support those who suffer the effects of anti-social behaviour by fellow students. Good quality relationships exist within school, and ensure that all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, receive support that matches well their identified needs.

There are clear systems in place for monitoring students' academic and pastoral progress, particular for those at greatest risk of disengaging from their education. All students have targets, but they are not always sure of how to best use them to improve their standards of work. For a number, the time interval between target setting discussions with teachers is too long, with some students feeling strongly that too little use is made of personal targets by some staff to help improve their learning and raise standards. Students are kept well informed about school activities, including information and advice about their general well-being, work and future career opportunities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is effectively supported by a highly motivated and energetic senior leadership team. Middle managers enthusiastically accept the delegated responsibilities offered to them, and feel both empowered and well-supported by the headteacher.

The headteacher has created a common sense of purpose amongst staff, with an emphasis on raising standards across the school. The senior leadership team recognise the need to improve standards, and acknowledge that although standards are rising across the school, there is still further work to be done. The school is aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and managers have a clear understanding of priorities. Action plans are in place to ensure that the school has the capacity to raise standards further for all students. Achieving dual specialist status has given the school a clear steer about future developments.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis to improve learners' outcomes. The safeguarding of students is good, and child protection procedures in school comply

fully with legal requirements. The school works effectively with partner agencies to tackle absenteeism, social care and matters relating to racism and bullying.

The school has a good reputation locally. Governors have a clear understanding of local needs and the direction for the school in meeting the needs of students and the community. They are supportive of the headteacher and the school, and are seeking ways to develop more formal links with the student body. They discharge their duties effectively with good financial management, and the school provides good value for money. Governors are effective, particularly in meeting the social needs of students, but they need to be more of a 'critical friend' with regard to evaluation of the curriculum and attainment in the school.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Walker Technology College

Middle Street

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tyne and Wear

NE6 4BY

26 January 2007

Dear Students

You will know that I recently visited Walker College with four colleagues to inspect how well the school is helping you to achieve the best that you can in your education. I should like to thank you all for the help that you gave inspectors and, in particular, your willingness to talk openly and honestly about being a student at the school. I should also like to thank your parents for returning the inspection questionnaire. Many raised very important points that I considered very carefully during the inspection.

You have a good school, with committed teachers. You told inspectors that you feel safe in school, and that you trust your teachers to support you as well as they can. Your behaviour during the inspection was good, although some parents would like this aspect to improve further, so that it does not affect how well you do in your lessons.

A lot of the teaching that we saw was good, although we feel that not all lessons reach this standard because there is insufficient challenge for some of you; this means that on some occasions you are not working at a level suitable to your ability. You have lots of opportunities to participate in school activities, and the range of subjects that you study is helping you to enjoy what you do, and achieve well.

The headteacher and other senior staff want you to do well, and they are well aware of what needs to be done to help you achieve to the best of your ability. You have an important part to play in this also. You need to work hard, listen carefully, and ensure that you attend school regularly.

The standards that you achieve by the time you leave school are what we would expect to see, but all of you need to continue working very hard to improve further, especially in English and mathematics.

Those of you in the sixth form are making good progress, and we were very encouraged by what we saw you doing over the two days that we were in school. We would like to see more of you go into the sixth form, to reach standards that many of you are capable of achieving.

I wish you all the very best for your future.

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector