

# George Stephenson Community High School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	108639
<b>Local Authority</b>	North Tyneside
<b>Inspection number</b>	288145
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Graham HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1071
6th form	118
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Malcolm Stalker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Anne Welsh
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2002
<b>School address</b>	Southgate Killingworth Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE12 6SA
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 2008347
<b>Fax number</b>	0191 2008349

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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 school is about the same size as most secondary schools although numbers fluctuate from year to year. The school serves a mixed area with pockets of economic and social deprivation. Relatively few students are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) has risen in recent years and is now well above the national average although the proportion of students with a statement of educational need is in line with national figures. Some students have social and emotional difficulties. Most students are from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion of students are learning English as an additional language. The school was designated as a specialist school in September 2005, specialising in humanities. There is a small sixth form run in collaboration with two other schools. The number of students in the sixth form increased considerably in 2007. The school has a number of external awards and accreditations including The Healthy School Award. The school was a member of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust most improved club in 2006 and 2007.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

George Stephenson Community High School is a good school because it is very well led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and she is very well supported by an effective senior leadership team. The governing body is experienced and astute and individual governors bring a good range of skills to the role. Middle leaders are capable and enthusiastic. Some middle leaders are comparatively new to leadership roles; they are very well supported by the senior team and are having a very positive impact on their individual departments.

Teachers and students are exceptionally well focused on learning. Students are given very good guidance about their current levels of attainment and what they must do to improve. They evaluate their own work and that of others and set targets for further improvement. They are supported extremely well in lessons and at other times in the school day. Systems used to assess students and track their progress are very robust. The academic and personal support provided for students is exemplary.

In the past there were difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff and this had a significant impact on some departments and on examination results. The school has tackled this through a programme of staff training and development. Teachers and middle managers are held accountable for the progress of individual students and procedures to monitor the work of the school are rigorous.

Students enter the school with average academic standards. Given their starting points they have not progressed well enough during Key Stage 3 in recent years. Although a very high proportion reach the nationally expected Level 5 in English, mathematics and science, very few reached the highest levels in English and science. In mathematics the proportion of students reaching the very highest levels was in-line with national figures in 2007.

By the end of their time in school all students achieve well. The proportion of students who gained five good grades at GCSE (grades A\*-C) was above the national average in 2007. The proportion for whom these five good grades included English and mathematics was just below the national figure. Students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities and those who are most vulnerable make good progress. Students attained particularly well in English at GCSE but did not achieve as well in mathematics.

Evidence from school tracking data, the results of modular examinations already completed, and work seen in lessons and in books during the inspection indicate that students are now making better progress in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics at Key Stage 4.

Much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, explain work clearly and make work interesting and accessible to students. The best lessons progress at a brisk pace. Students work at demanding tasks and ambitious targets are set for their achievement. Students respond very well to this because most are focused on learning and want to improve. They confidently assess their levels of understanding and happily ask for further explanation or support if necessary. Good practice from individual departments has been shared across the school very successfully but in a small minority of cases is not well embedded at individual teacher level; this is particularly noticeable with regard to marking.

The curriculum has been successfully adapted to cater for the needs of all students. Interesting alternatives to the more traditional curriculum are provided for those students who might be at risk of being excluded or becoming disaffected. There are a good range of extra-curricular

activities and day and residential visits. Increasing numbers of students are now opting to continue their education at the school.

The school's specialism is well led and managed. Students say that they enjoy the specialist subjects because they are interesting and because they learn a lot. The specialism is having a very good impact on students' achievement and on improving teaching and learning across the school. Many students choose to continue studying these subjects in the sixth form.

The school cares for and supports students very well. There are very good partnerships with other agencies and effective systems within school. The academic and personal guidance provided for students is outstanding. Attendance, although still below national figures, is improving and the proportion of students who persistently fail to attend is reducing. Behaviour is good. Relationships within the school are excellent. Students get on well with each other and with the staff. They say that they feel safe and know how to stay healthy. All procedures to keep students safe are rigorous and implemented consistently.

School self evaluation is outstanding. As a result, the areas requiring further improvement have already been identified and acted upon. The school has improved significantly since its last inspection. The capacity for further improvement is good. The school provides good value for money.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is satisfactory with some strengths. More than half of the Year 11 cohort progressed to the sixth form in 2007 this demonstrates a growing confidence in the provision made. Students' achievement is satisfactory but varies between subjects and is below predicted targets. Achievement is good in English and in history. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but some good and very good teaching was seen during the inspection. In the best lessons students made good progress. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. Media studies will be introduced in 2008 and provision is expanding throughout the three schools within the partnership. The timetable has been changed so that students can take both English and mathematics in the coming year. The school accepts that it has taken some borderline candidates on to 'A' level courses. As a result, many students take only two examinations. Plans made to improve the sixth form identify strategies to ensure all students are on appropriate courses.

Students are very positive about the sixth form and about the good care, guidance and support they receive. Most students progress to higher education. The three schools work well together and share good practice and rigorous monitoring arrangements.

The sixth form is well led and managed. A particular strength is the very effective monitoring of students' progress against their challenging, academic targets. The sixth form has good capacity to improve.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that all teachers consistently apply good practice, especially in marking.

## Achievement and standards

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Given their starting points students have not made enough progress in Key Stage 3 in recent years. A high proportion of students reached Level 5 in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2007 but far fewer students reached the highest levels in English and science than did so nationally. In mathematics the proportion of students reaching the highest levels was in line with national figures.

By the end of their time in school all students achieve well. The proportion of students who gained five good grades at GCSE in 2007 was above the national average and the proportion for whom these five good grades included English and mathematics was just below the national figure. Students did particularly well in history, science and English. More students gained the highest grades in English than did so nationally. Results in mathematics were disappointing and the proportion of students reaching the highest levels was below national averages and much lower than in English.

Evidence from the inspection confirms that students are now making good and sometimes excellent progress in many lessons. The tasks they are given are demanding and are usually well matched to their age and ability. The much improved results in mathematics in Key Stage 3 in 2007 demonstrate the effectiveness of the action which has been taken to bring about improvement.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence**

Students are very proud of the school. They have good relationships with their teachers and with other students and the school is a calm and happy place. Attendance is below the national average but improving. The number of students who are persistent non-attenders is reducing and attendance figures for the autumn term show that attendance in all year groups improved. Students of all ages say that they feel safe and that the new fence has done much to enhance their feelings of security. Students know how to stay healthy and comment that the opportunity to use the new community sports centre, located next to the school site, has done much to increase their enjoyment of sport and exercise.

The school sets demanding and ambitious targets for students but students know that this is a two way process. They are taught to be evaluative and are able to comment constructively on their own work and learning and that of others, including their teachers. The innovative 'student voice' initiative has groups of students working with departments on specific improvement tasks. Most students are able to give their teachers constructive feedback on which activities and tasks are particularly effective in promoting learning. This ability to reflect on the success or otherwise of activities is preparing students exceptionally well for making choices in their future lives.

Students are polite and well mannered. Although a very small number of parents expressed concerns about behaviour. The behaviour seen during the inspection was at least good and often better. Students are well supervised by staff but in the main they are given the freedom to make their own choices. They usually choose to behave thoughtfully and sensibly. They walk

around the school calmly, opening doors for adults and greeting teachers and visitors pleasantly. Students understand that there is a 'behaviour for learning' and on the very few occasions when a student did not meet this standard in lessons they were quick to respond to a well timed reminder from the teacher. The school has worked hard to establish consistent methods of dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Students confirm that any incidents of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with promptly and that there are a number of people who would help them if they had a problem.

Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. The school is helping students prepare for life in a multicultural society. Recent work on the holocaust provided opportunities for students to confront important issues and when some asylum seekers visited the school students increased their understanding of the needs of others outside their own culture and community.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence**

The school talks of learning and teaching and sees learning as the most important activity which takes place in school. Plans to improve the school are focused on improving students' learning and lessons are designed to help students achieve as well as possible. As a result, much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good. Lessons proceeded at a brisk pace and students were given a range of sharp, well focused activities. Students worked on individual tasks and in pairs or with the rest of the class. They were reminded about their current attainment and encouraged to aim high and achieve demanding targets. Most teaching is extremely thorough. Teachers take students through carefully planned steps which help them to achieve challenging targets. Students are happy to ask for help when they do not understand and teachers are very good at providing additional explanations or well targeted support. In those lessons where teaching was most demanding students worked hard for the entire lesson and behaviour was exemplary.

The school has put a great deal of effort into improving teaching. A very effective programme of professional development ensures that staff are well informed about the most effective strategies to improve learning. There is still some variation between departments with some, for example English, having developed very effective practice over a number of years. School leaders ensure that this good practice and that which is emerging from other departments is shared across the school. As a result students benefit from consistent routines and expectations and teachers are aware of those methods and activities which are particularly effective. A very small number of teachers do not always conform to school expectations. For example, marking is usually very effective giving students good advice on how to improve but a few teachers still rely too heavily on a tick and a positive comment.

The staff are enthusiastic and work well together as part of departmental and whole school teams. It is evident that they enjoy their work and gain a great deal of satisfaction from helping students to succeed. Systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school are robust and teachers are accountable for the success or otherwise of their students. Very good support is provided for all staff but especially for those who are new to the school or taking on additional responsibilities.

Teachers appointed to the school most recently are already making a very positive impact.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is enriched by a number of subjects and activities designed to ensure that all students achieve well and benefit from their time in school. Literacy is promoted in all subjects and there are opportunities for students to develop good speaking and listening skills. Media studies is offered as an option at Key Stage 4 and a high proportion of students opt for it. There are joint enterprise projects with a school in Kenya. Collaborative arrangements, for instance with Barnardos, enrich the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is good and very successfully supports home learning (the school version of homework.) Facilities for design and technology (DT) have been considerably enhanced in recent years and students appreciate the increased emphasis on design. Students at risk of becoming disaffected study for award scheme development and accreditation network awards (ASDAN) and the applied studies (modular vocational) course not only benefits those students who follow it but also the rest of the school who reap the benefit of their building and improvement work. There are some residential visits and all students have the opportunity to visit places of interest linked to their studies. There are a good range of extra-curricular activities and many students choose to attend after school study support sessions.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence**

This aspect of the school's work is exemplary. All students have specific support structures which help them feel valued and important. Guidance managers have both the time and the commitment to fulfil their roles and they have developed very good links with outside agencies. The school has very effective systems to assess students and to track their progress. The data collected is used on a day-to-day basis, by all staff, to plan lessons and set challenging targets for students. The results of assessments are shared with students and they know their predicted levels or grades. Students are encouraged to improve upon their already ambitious targets and are given very good guidance and support to enable them to do so. Achievement coordinators support all students who are at risk of failing to achieve their predicted grades. All students are fully included in the life of the school and teachers try hard to find courses and activities to motivate them. Procedures to keep students safe are rigorous.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has created a created a highly effective and purposeful school in which everyone is valued. She is very good at spotting the potential in her staff and many teachers who are now in relatively senior positions have come through the school's development programme. This is building capacity and providing effective and well informed senior leaders. Some middle managers are well established but some are comparatively new to the role. Despite their different levels of experience most middle managers



are successfully improving their departments and having a very positive impact on students' achievement.

The sixth form and the specialism are well led and managed and both have good capacity to improve.

The governing body is effective and experienced. Governors understand the strengths of the school but are equally aware of the areas which could be further improved. The governing body has successfully streamlined its activities in order to have more time to focus on those areas in which they can make a difference.

School leaders are ambitious and determined and school self-evaluation is rigorous, accurate and extremely honest. All staff have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and those areas which require some improvement and all are clear about their role in the process.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	IE <sup>2</sup>
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	IE <sup>2</sup>
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	IE <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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

15 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of George Stephenson Community High School, North Tyneside,

NE12 6SA

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school with Mrs Harwood, Mr Dixon and Mr Rooney. We really enjoyed our visit. I am delighted to tell you that we think your school is a good school with many strengths.

Mrs Welsh is an excellent headteacher. As you know she wants you to have the best education possible and in order to achieve this she has ensured that the school has a very clear focus on learning. The school recognises that teaching is only effective if it helps you to learn and make good progress, so you are encouraged to give your teachers feedback on how well you are achieving and to identify those times when you might need extra help and support. We liked the fact that some departments ask you to comment on the types of teaching which you think are particularly useful and we were very pleased to hear about the 'student voice' initiative. Because teachers really listen to your comments it is helping them to make lessons even more effective and enjoyable. A few teachers do not mark your work well enough because they do not tell you what you must do to improve. We have asked the school to ensure that all marking is very good in the future.

As you know by the end of their time in school students achieve well. A very high proportion of students gained five good grades at GCSE last year and the proportion of students gaining the very highest grade in English was above national averages. However, students did not achieve as well in mathematics and this was a concern to the school.

Mrs Welsh is good at spotting very good teachers and giving them extra responsibilities. This means that the staff that help Mrs Welsh to lead and manage the school are also very effective. They have acted very promptly to improve teaching in mathematics and in some other subjects and we could see that their actions have been effective.

The school takes very good care of you and gives you exceptionally good guidance and support. This means that you enjoy school, progress well and feel happy and safe. We were very impressed with your behaviour both in lessons and at break and lunchtime times and we were pleased to see that you have such good relationships with the staff and with each other. Although a minority of students do not attend school regularly enough attendance is improving. Please try to attend school every day. If you do not attend regularly you will not benefit from all the school has to offer.

We were very impressed with your school and with the way you are involved in helping it to improve further. We wish you well for the future.

Best wishes

Christine Graham

Her Majesty's Inspector