

Conyers School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111730
Local Authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	289039
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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
Number on roll	
School	1373
6th form	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	
Headteacher	Mr John Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2002
School address	Green Lane Yarm Stockton-on-Tees TS15 9ET
Telephone number	01642 783253
Fax number	01642 783834

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Conyers School is larger than most secondary schools. The socio-economic profile of the area the school serves is favourable but there are some parts experiencing social deprivation. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. Most students are of White British heritage but a small number have Asian backgrounds. The school has mathematics and computing specialist status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Conyers is a good school. Students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and for employment. They have above average basic skills which they use flexibly across subjects and they are confident and articulate young people. Standards are rising and recent results in the GCSE examinations, particularly the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades which include English and mathematics, have been well above average. Every student gained at least five A* to G grades in 2006. The school's efficient tracking of progress shows that these standards are being maintained. The school has been concerned about the attainment of the younger students of average ability. It has put in place measures to address this and the result has been an improvement in standards in 2006, particularly in mathematics and science. The proportion of more able students attaining at the higher Level 6 or above increased significantly that year in all three core subjects. Students' progress and achievement across the main school are good.

A number of parents and some students express concern about poor behaviour affecting learning in lessons. Inspection observations across a range of subjects and years groups found behaviour to be good. For example, a low ability Year 9 class with a less experienced teacher were lively but biddable youngsters who were prepared to learn. On the few occasions when behaviour was seen to slip it was dealt with quickly and effectively. The school's own monitoring of behaviour shows only minor incidents. Alternative provision is made for the very small number of students who cannot cope with normal class discipline. The school is aware of parental perceptions but sees classroom management as good.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are good. They say they feel safe and secure in school and that bullying is not a major issue. Students enjoy their work and attendance rates are above average. They know how to stay healthy; they have a balanced diet at lunchtime and take regular exercise. The school's question time forum is developing as a means for students to present their views and influence the school's development. Students participate in community activities, particularly in the areas of fundraising and environmental conservation work. The school is looking to extend the opportunities for older students to take on responsibility, for example in supporting learners in Years 7 and 8.

Teaching and learning are good. Students have good listening skills and they concentrate for extended periods. They work well collaboratively and independently and make good use of computer technology as a learning aid. There has been an increase in the availability and use of such resources as a result of the school's specialist status. The quality of teaching seen ranged from satisfactory to outstanding and was good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge and lesson planning are very good. However, students are not always given sufficient guidance on how to improve their work.

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of all students. Students receive good care, their progress is monitored well and appropriate support is given when weaknesses are uncovered. Leadership and management at all levels are good, as is the school's governance. The school recognises that there is not yet the consistent and regular implementation of agreed policies by all staff. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection and the school's capacity to improve further is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Standards are above average. Students make good progress in relation to their starting points and achieve well. This is because the sixth form provides a positive learning environment within which good teaching promotes rapid progress. Students are keen to learn and they very quickly acquire the independence and other study skills they need to be successful. However, facilities currently available for independent study in school and out of lessons are limited. Students' personal development is also good. Sixth form students are mature and purposeful learners and many contribute very well to the main school community. Examples of this are the mentoring of younger students, the supporting of reading and the roles they take as community sports leaders. Almost all students complete their courses. Students know how well they are performing in relation to their target grades agreed with their teachers. Most understand what they must do to improve in each of their courses but there is some inconsistency between subjects in this area. Students are well prepared for future economic independence. They are very well supported by tutors and teachers. They receive helpful guidance about opportunities in higher education and careers. The curriculum gives a good choice, albeit of almost exclusively Advanced Level courses. The range of courses available meets the needs of academic students well. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Clear systems for evaluating the effectiveness of provision are in use and there is a strong commitment to ensuring that learners receive good support and achieve well. The sixth form gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all students receive appropriate guidance on how to improve their work.
- Raise standards by the end of Year 9, particularly the attainment of students of average ability.
- Ensure that agreed policies and development plans are implemented consistently by all staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Students join the school with a wide range of ability but overall attainment on entry is above average. Standards by the end of Year 9 have been consistently above average over recent years and were again so in 2006. That year saw an increase in the proportion of students attaining at the higher Level 6 and above. The school met its target for attainment at Level 5 in mathematics but missed the target in English and science. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. The school has the raising the standards for students of average ability as a priority for improvement.

There have been improvements in GCSE results over the last two years. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average and in 2006, the school met its target for the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades. Results were well above average when that measure included English and mathematics. All students attained at least five A* to G grades, again a well above average result. The January trial examinations and the school's tracking systems show that these standards are being maintained. There have been good improvements since the previous inspection in the attainment of boys. Progress and achievement by the end

of Year 11 are good for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from a minority ethnic background.

A few students join the sixth form from other schools and overall attainment at the start of Advanced Level courses is average. Examination results show a rising trend and standards in Year 13 are above average. These results represent good achievement when students' starting points are taken into account. Challenging targets are set and met in the sixth form and inspection evidence indicates that standards are being maintained.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Students enjoy school. This is demonstrated by their above average attendance rates and the positive attitudes they display in class and around school. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students say they feel safe from bullying and that there is no discrimination. They eat well and take plenty of exercise. Many sixth formers take on responsibilities in main school to support the learning of younger students and the school wants to extend this. The recently introduced question time forum is being developed as a means for students to air their views and to influence the school's development. Charitable work and environmental conservation projects enable students to play an active and worthwhile part in the local community. Students' very good basic skills and their ability to use them in a variety of contexts prepare them well for the next stage of their education and for their future economic well-being. Sixth formers are confident young people who have the independent learning skills to be successful in higher education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good, both in the main school and the sixth form. This is due to the good planning and preparation by teachers and the good behaviour and cooperation of the students. Teachers set clear learning objectives which allow students to understand what is required. Outstanding lessons were seen where the pace was brisk, the work was challenging and good questioning encouraged students to think for themselves. For example, questioning in a Year 12 philosophy lesson was deliberately provocative to stimulate thinking about a controversial issue. Specialist school status in mathematics and computing has enabled teachers across the school to use information and communication technology (ICT) with confidence to engage and motivate students. Individual learning plans for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are used well by teachers and effective support from teaching assistants enables these students to make good progress.

Most students know the levels at which they are working and the targets they are expected to reach. The students appreciate opportunities to set personal targets in some subjects such as science as it helps them to know what to do to improve. This good practice is not evident in all subjects. The development of assessment methods involving students is a teaching and learning priority set by the school for this year. Marking of students' work does not always

inform them about how they might improve and so there is inconsistent application of agreed assessment procedures.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good throughout the school, including the sixth form. It is well constructed to meet the needs and aspirations of its students and all statutory requirements are met. A particular strength is the continuity and progression it provides from ages 11 to 19. For example, an innovative transition project using computer technology successfully combines with work in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages to ease the move from primary to secondary school learning. At Key Stage 3 the National Curriculum is followed, with drama contributing well to students' personal development.

At Key Stage 4 the curriculum maintains a modern foreign language as a core subject and has the flexibility for less able students to pursue French studies through the recently introduced hospitality and tourism option. Applied engineering, health and social care, ICT and the European computer driving licence are further vocational courses that provide breadth and diversity to the curriculum. The school has as a priority the development of 14 to 19 courses. Education for safety and health are good through the personal, social and health education programme but the citizenship and community elements of the curriculum are not fully developed. The school's specialist status has a positive impact, most notably in the development of key skills in literacy, numeracy and computer technology to promote future economic well-being. Curriculum resources are also beginning to be made available on the school's website. There are excellent opportunities for enrichment which are extensive and varied, have a high take-up, and are much enjoyed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school's atmosphere is calm and purposeful. Students say they feel safe and well cared for and that teachers are always ready to help. The school liaises with service providers to ensure that the care and support provided to vulnerable students are good. The school's procedures for child protection are in place and arrangements to keep students safe follow current national guidelines. Teachers are conscientious in addressing risks both at school and when students are out on activities. The small number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported effectively by staff; their individual education plans are good and they are given the resources and time they need to progress well. This is also the case with the few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The achievement of every student in gaining at least five A* to G grades at GCSE in 2006 is testimony to the school's commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity. The school makes good use of assessment data to monitor students' progress throughout the main school and in the sixth form. Students in Years 12 and 13 receive very good guidance and support. They are steered onto courses that best suit their interests and aptitudes. Support for students entering higher education is a strong feature of the provision and this ensures very high take-up rates.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good at all levels in main school and in the sixth form. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is well supported by able and experienced senior staff who work harmoniously and effectively as a team. They are committed to equality of opportunity for all students and the removal of any barriers to their academic and personal development. The school is rigorous in its evaluation of performance and knows what needs to be done to improve. Senior teachers are looking at ways, for example, to support all staff in implementing agreed policies and procedures consistently. Planning is done well and is rooted in extensive consultation. The priorities for development are appropriate and centre on promoting high quality care and education to raise standards. There are very good links with partner institutions to ensure continuity in educational provision. The governors know the school well and play a full part in evaluating performance and shaping its future direction. The school is well staffed. There is an appropriate range of good quality resources to support students' learning, particularly in ICT, and these resources are used well to secure good value for money. There have been good improvements since the last inspection, especially in the boys' attainment at GCSE and in the quality of guidance sixth formers receive about future pathways. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

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Annex A

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	2	2
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	2	
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.

Annex A

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

29 March 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Conyers School, Stockton-on-Tees, TS15 9ET

Thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and it was a pleasure to look at the work you are doing. I am grateful to those of you who gave of your time to talk to us about your school. Please thank your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and let them know that all their views were taken into account.

Our main finding is that Conyers is a good school and that you are taught well. Most of the lessons we observed were good and some were outstanding. Standards are above average in the main school and in the sixth form and your progress and achievement are good. You have very good basic skills and the personal qualities to make a success of the next stage of your education and to prepare you for future employment.

We found a strong sense of community in your school. The atmosphere is friendly and you told us that most of you feel happy and safe. Concerns were raised by some students about the behaviour of a small number of the younger students in lessons. The attitudes and behaviour we saw in lessons were good. The increasing proportion of students who continue with education and training, at the end of Years 11 and 13, helped to confirm our view that you receive good support and guidance.

When you read our report you will see that it contains three areas for improvement. One relates to raising standards by the end of Year 9. The other two are about teachers being consistent in the routines they adopt to help you with your work. In some lessons, for example, you are not clear about what you must do to improve your work.

My colleagues and I wish you well with your studies and your plans for the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead Inspector