

Netherhall School: Specialist Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112382
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	289267
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock 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
Number on roll	
School	920
6th form	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Keith Little
Headteacher	Mr David Sibbit
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	Netherhall Road Maryport Cumbria CA15 6NT
Telephone number	01900 813434
Fax number	01900 814867

Age group	11–18
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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

Netherhall is a specialist Sports College located in a small town on the Cumbrian coast. It serves an area with higher levels of deprivation than normally found and provides extended services. Extra funds from specialist status and the National Lottery have provided a new and well used community sports centre. SportsMark status was renewed in 2006. Nearly all the students have English as their first language and the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. During their last inspection two years ago, the school was found to have serious weaknesses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's previous designation as having serious weaknesses no longer applies. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Achievement and standards are satisfactory and rising, the quality of teaching is satisfactory and attendance has improved. Behaviour has improved over the last two years and is satisfactory. It remains a concern to a proportion of parents who feel behaviour, at times, is not good enough.

The school is moving in the right direction, knows itself well, and is taking the right action to make improvements. It expects to see the full impact of these actions shortly; for example, in examination results, behaviour and the quality of teaching. The standards reached have improved with most, but not all targets met. Students make satisfactory progress including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students reach standards that are below average, frequently from a low starting point for many of them. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and contribute positively to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being.

Personal development is good and the school has other strengths; such as, partnerships with other providers. The curriculum is good, particularly the wide range of activities outside lesson time. The quality of teaching and learning has improved in the last two years, although there is insufficient good teaching to consistently challenge all students to achieve more highly. Monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and there are examples of very good practice, which is shared among teachers. Recently introduced student tracking systems are working well and help the school to understand more fully the progress students can make.

The school is steered by the headteacher working closely with the local authority and supported by a strong team of senior leaders. The governing body is making sure the school continues to move forward and capacity to improve is satisfactory. Resources and accommodation are effectively deployed to achieve satisfactory value for money. Specialist college status has made a good impact in the last three years and has been very effective in supporting improvement. Provision and achievement in the new community sports centre is very good and has raised achievement, for example in physical education (PE).

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form, including its leadership and management are satisfactory. A more rigorous system for tracking students' progress and a sharper focus on improving teaching and learning are now resulting in improvements in standards and achievement in the sixth form. Examination results improved in 2006, although standards remain below national averages. Students' achievement is satisfactory given their below average starting points and GCSE grades. They perform best in religious education (RE), business, performing arts and media studies and least well in health and social care, and art.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to think for themselves and learn independently. They work well collaboratively and enrichment activities such as Young Enterprise help them develop the skills needed for the world of work. Students' personal development is good. They enjoy being in the sixth form, have good relationships with teachers and feel that students' views are listened to. They are very appreciative of the support and encouragement they are given in choosing higher education courses, which are

well matched to their needs and allow them to pursue interests as diverse as fashion design, music and journalism. Most students complete their courses and gain the grades needed to enter their choice of university. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure targets for achievement and standards are consistently met.
- Improve the proportion of good and better teaching.
- Ensure behaviour is consistently good.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with attainment which is below average for most year groups. Achievement is satisfactory and standards are below average in the main school and the sixth form. There are fewer higher attaining students and more with weaker literacy skills than is usual. Students make satisfactory progress as they move through the school to reach below average standards at the end of Year 11.

The 2006 test results in Year 9 were below average and slightly lower than those of the previous year. However, students' achievement, given their capabilities and starting points, improved in 2006. It was satisfactory and the school's targets were met. Students with learning difficulties are making satisfactory progress because they receive constructive individual help from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual and moral well-being are strong features, mainly because they are developed through a carefully planned daily act of collective worship, where opportunities for quiet reflection are regularly given. Students make good progress socially, through the productive relationships established between themselves and with adults in the school. This has the added benefit of giving students a strong sense of feeling safe. They make good progress culturally through the broad and balanced classroom curriculum, which is enhanced through the particularly extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities.

Attendance has improved through the rigorous efforts of the school and is now satisfactory. Behaviour has improved over the last two years and is satisfactory. Students referred to the seclusion unit significantly improve their behaviour although the total number of referrals remains high. Attitudes to learning have improved as a result of more challenging teaching.

Students contribute positively to the community. They have installed a mosaic sculpture and evocative lines of poetry on the harbour quayside. The school council has a strong influence in the school and is active in making suggestions for improving behaviour and the school's system of rewards. The Specialist Sports College status offers many diverse opportunities for students to be involved in sporting activities. This, and awareness of healthy eating options, provided in the school's dining areas, contributes to students adopting a healthy lifestyle. Good careers guidance ensures that the large majority continue their training or education after

leaving school. Students develop skills and personal qualities that help them to achieve good future economic well-being. During the inspection, a group of students who formed a Young Enterprise company competed against local schools and went through to the final county competition.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's own assessment that teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school recognises the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and has begun to take effective steps to do this. Teaching is carefully monitored, weaker teachers are coached and supported, and good practice is shared. As a result, teaching is improving; students' short term progress in lessons is often good, although this has yet to be fully consolidated over time. Inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and in the assessment of students' work across departments.

Typically, lessons are well planned and structured and teachers have good relationships with their students. Work is usually well matched to students' needs. In the best lessons, expectations are high, the pace is brisk and students are skilfully guided to assess their own work. In lessons where the pace of learning is slower, work is not sufficiently challenging and teachers' expectations are lower.

The quality of assessment and use of assessment data varies between subjects. In history and RE very good use is made of assessment and tracking data to help students improve their work. In some other subjects students are not always given sufficiently precise guidance to help them reach the next grade or level. Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress because they are given constructive individual support by specialist teachers and teaching assistants and work is well matched to their needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good and national requirements are met. The needs of students are met especially in the way activities are modified year-by-year to meet different circumstances and levels of prior attainment. Its limitation is that it has not yet met school aspirations towards raising standards. Strategies have been put in place to address the needs of borderline students, for example in literacy and ICT.

Students have a suitable range of course options to choose from and receive appropriate support in making choices. Effective guidance supports personal and social development. A particular strength of the curriculum lies in its rich enhancement through visits and opportunities for learning out of school hours; for example, through the recent street dance project and very lively student involvement in the stimulating 'Rock Challenge' production.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and contribute positively to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being. This is especially evident through the provision of mentors for all students in Year 7, and by the use of support strategies in Key Stage 4 that deal with concerns over students at the borderline of achieving the higher grades. Students benefit from the practical advice they are given through being set individual targets. The school does not have a sufficiently rigorous system of assessment to tackle the inconsistencies that currently exist between teachers and across subjects. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to students' learning needs.

Students and parents agree that students are looked after well. Careful attention is paid to health and safety issues and child protection. The seclusion unit is effective in providing a calm, secure and well-resourced environment for those students who are at risk of exclusion. Arrangements when joining the school and leaving for further and higher education are good. There are effective links with parents and a range of local agencies safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties. Students with physical disabilities are welcomed into the school and are well supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management, including the role of the governing body, are satisfactory. A clear sense of direction has been established and improvement is happening at a steady pace. Senior leaders know their main priority is raising standards through sustained improvement in teaching and learning. Over one third of the teaching staff have joined the school in the last two years. Procedures for monitoring effectiveness, including strategies developed by the governing body, are good but still have to make their full impact on achievement.

The school has a secure understanding of strengths and areas for development. Strategies for self-evaluation include consultation with all staff and seeking the views of parents and students. Self-evaluation is accurate but has not yet made a full impact on aspirations to raise standards. The school can rightly point to improvements in teaching and learning, attendance and the way tracking of attainment is used to promote further progress. The good curriculum motivates and meets the needs of students. These factors have led to some improvement in standards. A deficit budget is being managed and reduced. Good links are made with other schools, colleges and with the community, particularly through the school's sports college status.

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?	3	3
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	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	3
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?	3	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	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	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

Netherhall School: Specialist Sports College

Netherhall Road

Maryport

Cumbria

CA15 6NT

22 March 2007

Dear Students

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues on 20 and 21 March. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- The school has improved and is moving in the right direction.
- Achievement and standards are satisfactory and rising.
- Your attitudes to learning have improved as a result of more challenging teaching.
- Your behaviour is much better and you attend more regularly.
- Provision in the new community sports centre is very good.
- The care, guidance and support you receive contributes positively to your progress.
- The curriculum is good, particularly the wide range of activities outside lesson time.
- The school is taking the right action to make further improvements and it was good to see the school council playing a full part.

Your teachers and the staff want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they could:

- continue to improve achievement and standards
- further improve the quality of teaching
- help you to improve your behaviour even more and to learn more quickly.

I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Paul Hancock

Her Majesty's Inspector