

Sir John Thursby Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134996
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	298619
Inspection dates	13–14 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	852
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil Tranmer
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Dawson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Eastern Avenue Burnley Lancashire BB10 2AT
Telephone number	01282 436321
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This new school was formed in September 2006 from the boys and girls who formerly attended Barden and Walshaw High schools. There are approximately 15% more girls than boys in the school. It is currently housed in temporary accommodation until September 2009 when the new building will be complete. The school is of average size and serves an area of Burnley which is more socio-economically disadvantaged than is the case nationally. The student population is ethnically very diverse with over half of students of Asian heritage. A similar proportion of students have English as an additional language. An above average percentage of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the proportion of those with a statement of special educational need is also above average. A greater percentage of students are eligible for free school meals than is the case nationally. The school has Investors in People status and a National Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sir John Thursby is a satisfactory school with some good features. This new school has improved rapidly since it was formed in September 2006 because it has been well led and managed. The headteacher demonstrates outstanding leadership, giving clear direction, providing ample reassurance and boosting the confidence of students and staff alike. With the loyal and effective support of senior leaders she has overseen the successful merger of two quite disparate schools. Transitional difficulties have been courageously tackled and effectively overcome.

The care, guidance and support the school provides for its students is good. Ensuring the health, safety and well-being of every student is at the heart of its work. Particularly sensitive and wide-ranging support is provided for vulnerable students, for those with English language needs, and for the higher than usual proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most students enjoy learning and attendance is above average. Behaviour is satisfactory and continues to improve because most students respond well to the positive way in which the school promotes good behaviour. Students' personal and academic progress is checked carefully and reported regularly to parents so they are kept well informed. Most parents are very positive about the school. Those whose children are in Year 7 are particularly appreciative of the way in which their sons and daughters have been helped to settle into their new school.

Standards are significantly below average but, given their capabilities and starting points, students' achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results in 2007, for students who had just moved into a new school, were well below average and the school's targets were not met. However, inspection evidence indicates that students are now more settled in their new school and there is a better climate for learning so standards are rising and achievement is improving. Current students were seen making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons and the school's detailed monitoring data indicates that most are on track to meet the challenging targets that have been set for them. A satisfactory and improving curriculum ensures that students are prepared for the world of work.

Students' achievement is satisfactory because in the vast majority of lessons teaching and learning are satisfactory. The day-to-day marking and assessment of students' work is not yet consistent across the school and consequently students are not always sure how well they are doing. In some lessons, teaching and learning are good and in a few they are outstanding. In these lessons the pace of work is brisk and all students are challenged to do their very best. This good practice that is evident in the best lessons is not yet shared sufficiently widely to raise the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Under their good leadership and on the basis of the rapid progress this school has made in the first eighteen months of its life it is very well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that improvements in the standards and achievement of current students are maintained and lead to better GCSE examination results.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and share good practice more effectively.
- Ensure consistency of practice in the marking and assessment of students work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are significantly below average but the students' achievement is satisfactory. Students enter the school with well below average standards. Literacy levels are particularly low. Students make satisfactory progress at both key stages to reach significantly below average standards when they leave. Lessons observed, a scrutiny of students' work and detailed school tracking data all indicate that students are making satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The achievement of all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language is satisfactory.

This new school has only had one set of test and examination results so these have to be interpreted with care as it is not possible to identify trends over several years. Year 9 test results indicate that overall students reached below average standards in 2007 and their achievement was good. School targets were met. Test results were highest in English and the data shows that students achieved better in English than they did in mathematics and science. However, the school recognises that assessment in English was over-generous and rightly acknowledges that standards and achievement in English are similar to those in the other two core subjects. GCSE results in 2007 were significantly below average. Students achieved best in art, religious education and information technology and least well in business studies, history and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Their attendance is well monitored and promoted by the school, is above average and improving. Students' punctuality, both to school and to lessons, is less impressive, and the school is working strenuously to improve this. Behaviour in and around the school is satisfactory. Students generally get on well with each other and with staff. However, both they and a few of their parents have some concerns about bullying although they trust the school to take them seriously. More consistent approaches to managing behaviour are succeeding in reducing the need for exclusion as a sanction. Students appreciate the fairness of the staged consequences to their actions and say that behaviour is much improved. The school council provides students with growing opportunities to take responsibility and influence the life of the school. Students' spiritual, social, moral, and cultural education is satisfactory and is supported by an effective personal guidance programme. Racial harmony prevails. As one student commented, 'We all get on here'. They are encouraged to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles; physical education and a popular range of extra-curricular activities ensure students have adequate exercise although the time for physical education in Years 10 and 11 is not generous. Careers advice, together with a growing range of vocational courses and enterprise activities, provide a useful foundation for preparing students for their adult lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Some good and outstanding teaching was seen, especially in modern languages. This good and outstanding practice is not yet shared across the school to raise the overall standard of the teaching from satisfactory to good. In the best lessons detailed planning and varied classroom activities ensure students' needs are met. Relationships between students and with adults in the classroom are good and students clearly enjoy their learning. Recapping and reinforcement of the learning at the end of lessons convinces students that they have made progress, raises their self esteem and contributes well to their personal development.

In the vast majority of lessons, teaching is satisfactory and leads to students making satisfactory progress. Planning is less well developed than in the best lessons and teaching lacks pace and challenge. Students know their targets but due to inconsistent marking they do not always have sufficient feedback to let them know how to make progress. In some lessons, activities and resources are not sufficiently varied to engage the interest of all students and their pace of learning slows.

The Learning Resource Unit is effective in meeting the wide range of students' needs. A particular strength of the school is the way that it uses its resources to provide a large number of teaching assistants. They give good individual support for all students, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those whose first language is not English.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with some notable strengths. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable is good. A personalised curriculum for those students who are in danger of becoming disaffected allows them to grow in confidence and achieve well. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and is improving each year better to meet the needs of all students. It provides an expanding choice of both academic and vocational courses. The personal, social and health education programme covers citizenship, careers education and health and safety issues satisfactorily. Good use is made of enterprise days, work experience and speakers with specialist knowledge to enrich the curriculum further and prepare students for the world of work. Students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are being developed satisfactorily. Students enjoy taking part in a well organised range of extra-curricular activities including sports, music, art and drama.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are strengths of the school. Inclusion and raising students' aspirations lie at the heart of its work. There is a high level of commitment and concern for the welfare of each student, regardless of capability, background or circumstance. All necessary health and safety requirements, safeguarding and child protection procedures are in place. Students are well known to staff and most say they feel safe and cared for. Teachers, support assistants, mentors and others link well with outside agencies to give all students constructive, individual

help and guidance. Strong links with primary schools smooth the transfer of students into their new school. These are reinforced by the effective foundation arrangements in Year 7 that successfully support their early academic and personal progress. Older students receive careful guidance when making their subject choices in Year 9, and about their career and post-16 opportunities. Both academic and pastoral progress are closely tracked. Students know their targets although not all are clear about how to improve their work. An improved rewards scheme that provides praise for those who do well is supporting improvements in students' personal development and academic attainment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. Challenging targets encompassing the whole of the school's provision have been set out and articulated to all the school's stakeholders. There is clear evidence that the school is growing stronger, not only in the creation of a more positive climate and ethos for learning, but in the behaviour of students which is improving all the time. The school recognises that there is still a long way to go, particularly in improving teaching and learning and raising standards and achievement, but school leadership has successfully laid the foundations which will enable the school to move forward. Currently, the school provides satisfactory value for money but there is good capacity to improve further. New systems of monitoring and self-evaluation are bedding in nicely and are appropriate for the school's current stage of development. Some aspects of middle leadership and management are strong but are not yet consistent in all middle leaders. The views of parents and students are actively sought in appraising the school's work and are taken seriously. Parents are supportive of the school and recognise the progress the school has made in the last eighteen months. They particularly appreciate the effectiveness of liaison with partner primary schools. Governance is good. Governors are knowledgeable, know the school well and give very constructive support to the headteacher and senior leaders.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

15 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir John Thursby Community College, Lancashire, BB10 2AT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school last week. A particular thank you to those of you who took time to talk to us about the many strengths of your school.

These are some of the things we have said about your school in our report:

- yours is a satisfactory school which is improving rapidly because it is well led and managed
- teaching is satisfactory and sometimes it is good. It helps you to make satisfactory progress in lessons
- you are given good care, guidance and support and your personal development is satisfactory.

This is what your school is going to do now:

- ensure that improvements in your achievement and the standards you are reaching are maintained and lead to better GCSE examination results
- improve the quality of teaching and learning even further
- ensure that the way in which your work is marked in all subjects makes it clear how well you are doing and helps you to improve further.

You can help your school to improve by behaving well and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector