

# Blakewater College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	134906
<b>Local Authority</b>	Blackburn with Darwen
<b>Inspection number</b>	300418
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 April 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Marguerite McCloy 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>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	530
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Andrew Fawcett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Lee Harris
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 April 2007
<b>School address</b>	Shadsworth Road Blackburn Lancashire BB1 2HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01254 505700
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

### Description of the school

Blakewater College opened in April 2005 following the closure of its predecessor school, Queen's Park Technology College. The college is smaller than most secondary schools and is situated in an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. An above average number of students enter or leave the college other than at the usual times. Over half of the students are eligible for free school meals, and 40% are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities; both of these figures are significantly above average, although the number of students with a statement of special educational need is similar to the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, 33%, is above average although very few are in the early stages of language acquisition.

The majority of the teaching staff were newly employed by the college at the time of its opening, and only six teachers remain from the predecessor school. During the first year of the college opening, there was also considerable turnover in support staff, although staffing overall is now stable.

### Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Blakewater College provides a good education for its students because it has made excellent progress since opening in April 2005. The highly effective leadership of the headteacher and senior team has maintained a determined focus on raising standards, and on improving students' personal development through high quality care, guidance and support.

Students achieve well. On entering the college, standards of attainment are well below the national average; students' weakest skills are in general literacy, and they often lack confidence or fluency in their verbal communication skills, resulting in these aspects progressing a little slower than other areas. However, students make good progress because of the good teaching, rigorous target setting and careful tracking of individual achievement at Blakewater. Test and examination results in 2006 showed considerable improvement in progress by the end of Year 11 and the college exceeded its own challenging targets. The rate of progress in Key Stage 3 has been slower, although it is satisfactory overall. Achievement in mathematics and English at Year 9 was stronger than in science, but work in this subject is now improving due to actions taken by the college. Taking contextual factors into consideration, the college was ranked by the DfES in the top 1% of schools in the country for improvement in 2006, having added 'outstanding value' to students' achievement overall.

The college has good links with other schools and outside agencies which benefit its students, and it has worked hard to develop good partnerships with the local community, parents and carers. The curriculum, including personal, social, health and citizenship education and careers guidance, prepares students well for the challenges ahead. As a result, students are growing in confidence and many have higher self-esteem and career aspirations.

Relationships throughout the college are very good, based on mutual respect and a determination by staff to give each individual the best possible chance to succeed. A minority of students still present a challenge because of their negative attitudes, and attendance overall is well below the national average. The majority of students enjoy their learning and are unanimous in identifying significant improvements in its provision over the last two years. They rightly attribute this to better quality teaching and a very clear focus on the college's motto of 'effort leading to achievement and success'.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 3.
- Provide more frequent opportunities for students to develop their confidence, communication and literacy skills across all subjects.
- Improve the personal development of the minority of students whose attitudes, behaviour or attendance are not as positive as they should be.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

The majority of students enter the college with standards which are well below average, particularly in their literacy and communication skills. Although standards remain well below average overall at the end of Year 9, progress in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, as demonstrated by the 2006 test results. Some discrepancy between subjects was apparent, with good achievement in English, satisfactory in mathematics, but progress in science was weaker. The

college acknowledges this and has taken action to remedy the issue. The impact of this is already being seen in science lessons and assessment tasks which show that students' rate of progress is improving.

Students make good progress in years 10 and 11. Some variation between subjects indicated that achievement in 2006 was satisfactory in English and very good in mathematics. Overall standards at Key Stage 4 improved significantly in the 2006 examinations, with 52% of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent. This was more than double the college's 2005 results and just 6% below the national average.

The number of students achieving five good GCSE grades or equivalent with English and mathematics included remains significantly below average. Nevertheless, almost half of students achieve this with functional English and mathematics, and this represents good progress overall. Based on their previous attainment at Key Stage 2, year 11 students in 2006 made very good progress, and this was evident across all groups of students.

The considerable improvements made in achievement and standards since the college opened when compared to results in the predecessor school have come about through determined actions by the college to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the rigorous monitoring of students' progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' personal development is satisfactory. They enter the college with below average personal and social skills and make good progress, for example in the improved attitudes and behaviour seen in lessons and around the college since its first monitoring inspections. This is a result of the very good care, guidance and support provided by the hard-working and dedicated staff. Senior students feel that their college has improved enormously over the last two years. They now enjoy the majority of lessons and feel very well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students feel safe and secure and know that adults listen to them. They say that the college deals with any bullying incidents effectively. The majority of students conduct themselves appropriately both in lessons and around college. The behaviour of the majority is satisfactory and often good, but there is a significant minority of students who do not fully engage with education. Those with emotional or behavioural difficulties value the imaginative and effective programme of support they receive through the off-site 'Int2gr8' initiative. Students in the Year 11 Achievement Group are very appreciative of all the college has done for them and are now confident that they can reach their potential. Attendance is improving slowly but at present remains well below average, despite the college's best efforts. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, but there are too few opportunities to promote spiritual development. Students are encouraged to join the many activities, trips and visits which enrich the life of the college. Healthy eating and keeping fit are actively promoted, although not all students embrace this. Many students make a positive contribution to their college and the wider community through the college council, active citizenship projects and fundraising for charities.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and occasionally outstanding, and this is bringing about good achievement.

Following the success, in most cases, of its 'quality audience' strategy, the college is now placing a strong emphasis on improving the consistency of the quality of learning across the school. There are now very few instances when the quality of learning lags behind the teaching. Senior leaders have a good overview of the relative strengths and weaknesses across the school and are using a variety of strategies, including individual coaching, to improve the teaching of those few staff needing support.

Most lessons are well organised, brisk and businesslike. Learning objectives are clear, shared with students, and referred back to at the end of the lesson. Good use of digital projectors is making lesson content more interesting. Teachers are increasingly skilled at managing potentially challenging behaviour, although over-use of the behaviour management strategy is rendering it ineffective in one or two cases. The strategy is necessary because there is still inertia and lack of enthusiasm in some groups of students, Year 9, for example.

Classroom relationships are very positive and productive on the whole. Tasks are chosen for their interest, relevance and practicality. Students are organised so that they are quickly active and involved, rather than passive listeners and such factors are proving to be some of the keys to successful lessons.

Teachers' day-to-day assessment of students' work has improved significantly. This is the result of a shared commitment to improving assessment, and ongoing monitoring by senior staff and directors of learning. Some good examples were seen in students' books of well-targeted, positive marking comments which both explained why something was good and also pointed out what needed to be improved. This is not yet consistently found across the college.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and contributes well to students' personal development. Provision is reviewed annually. It presently offers special provision to groups of students in years 7 and 8 which successfully nurtures and sets them up for success by easing their entry into secondary education. Students are able to earn their first GCSE successes in information and communication technology (ICT) and expressive arts, as early as Year 9. This helps them to improve their confidence before they begin the rest of their courses in Years 10 and 11. There are good links with a local college and other training organisations, enabling the school to offer a good proportion of its Key Stage 4 students a more vocational curriculum. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and there is growing provision for those who are gifted and talented. Vulnerable students are well cared for and receive lots of attention and one-to-one help. Provision for personal, health and social education, including careers guidance and citizenship is good. Active citizenship is a growing strength. Extra-curricular provision is good and many activities are well attended.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good, with some excellent features. The college cares for all its students extremely well. Health and safety procedures conform to local authority guidance, and risk assessments are carried out for all college trips. Child protection procedures are in place. This is an exceptionally caring college which provides very good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable students. The college has a number of excellent inclusion strategies, including the imaginative 'Int2gr8' programme which has successfully raised the self-esteem and engagement with education of some of the most vulnerable students. The Year 11 programme has enabled a group of underachieving students to improve their progress. The well-run SMART centre enables the college to operate an effective base for exclusion from lessons, which also acts as a re-integration system for students returning to college. A particularly good feature is the 'restorative justice' programme. The college works very well with other agencies to meet individual needs. Monitoring of academic progress is good. The well-structured reward system together with the innovative assessment of students' personal qualities, such as respect and personal responsibility, is successful in motivating many students. The college is developing good procedures with its partner primaries to help students move from primary to secondary education, for example the appointment of transition teachers shared with those schools. Careers' education and guidance are good, and vulnerable college leavers are particularly well-supported.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Highly effective leadership and management is a strong feature of the college which has been a key factor in its success to date. The headteacher gives clear direction whilst empowering staff to develop their own skills, use their initiative and lead by example. Senior and middle leaders contribute a range of individual skills and strengths which combine to form a strong and professional team with a common sense of purpose. The leadership can already demonstrate a very good track record in taking action to bring about improvement, for example in meeting targets set by the local authority and HMI since the college opened.

Leaders know the college well, and their accurate and concise self-evaluation matched the judgements made by the inspection team, although leaders had been modest in their evaluation of achievement and standards. Improvement planning is characterised by well focused action plans based on thorough analysis of information about student attainment, teaching and learning to identify current strengths and weaknesses. Middle leaders are held accountable for performance within their departments or areas of responsibility. Professional development activities are well planned to match the college's priorities and to improve middle leaders' confidence and skills in monitoring and evaluation. The college has successfully created an ethos of mutual trust and teamwork in which staff are able to share ideas and reflect on their own skills in order to learn from best practice.

Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths of the college and understand what needs to be done to bring about further improvement. They share the leadership team's ambitions for the college and are committed to building upon its improving reputation within the community. Governors have supported the senior team in the creative management of the staffing structure and allocation of responsibilities, including non-teaching staff. There is a

clear sense that all who work in the college are equally valued, and this helps to achieve a family atmosphere which supports students' personal development.

The college has made good use of the additional support and guidance provided by its School Improvement Partner and local authority advisers. Leaders are aware that more remains to be done to ensure that students' achievement and personal development continue to improve. Staff and resources are well deployed and financial management and planning is effectively targeted so that the college achieves good value for money. Taking into account progress made so far, and the whole-staff commitment to the college's vision, its capacity for 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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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

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

<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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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
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

27 April 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Blakewater College, Lancashire, BB1 2HT

As you know, inspectors recently spent two days in your college, observing lessons and talking to students and staff about their work. It was actually my fifth visit to the college, as I have been checking on its progress since Blakewater opened in 2005. You will be pleased to hear that inspectors found Blakewater to be a good college with many strengths. This has happened because of the excellent progress which has been made since the college opened. So much has been achieved in such a relatively short time, and I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing the improvements during each of my visits.

There are many things to be proud of in your college, and these are just some of the things we particularly noticed:

- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding so that your learning is better and standards are improving at a good rate.
- The college is very well led, and the staff are committed to guiding and supporting each of you to achieve the best you can and grow in confidence and maturity.
- The college has a family atmosphere where all members are valued and important, and there is a sense of enthusiasm about the place!
- You recognise and appreciate all the improvements that have been made in the college over the last two years, and spoke highly of these, for example: the dining facilities and food quality; better toilets; good levels of staff supervision so that you feel safe and well looked after; more interesting teaching and good relationships with staff so that your learning is better; improved behaviour and reward systems; help and guidance in small groups or individually when it is needed.

The college is always working to make things better, and inspectors have suggested the following priorities for improvement.

- Raise standards further in Key Stage 3.
- Develop students' communication and literacy skills further.
- Improve the attitudes, behaviour and attendance of the minority of students who struggle to enjoy their education.

You can play your part in each of these targets, and particularly in respect of the final point. The college does a tremendous amount of work to provide everything you need to reach your potential, but it is also up to you to take full advantage of it! A small number of students continue to be reluctant to improve their attitudes and behaviour and to make sure they attend college regularly and on time, but most of you are doing this really well now. We enjoyed hearing you talk about your goals and aspirations and how you were going to work to achieve these.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Marguerite McCloy

Her Majesty's Inspector