

Spennymoor Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114300
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	301362
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Grieveson 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	734
6th form	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Fred Walker
Headteacher	Mr Paul Gillis
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Whitworth Lane Spennymoor County Durham DL16 7LN
Telephone number	01388 815634
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Age group	11–19
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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

Spennymoor Comprehensive School is a smaller than average size school located to the west of the town centre. It is a popular school serving students living in Spennymoor town and neighbouring villages. The school was awarded specialist technology college status in 1999 and works in close partnership with Bishop Auckland College and other local schools. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is higher than average and the school has a greater percentage of students entitled to free school meals than is seen nationally. Almost all students are of White British heritage. The school has achieved healthy schools status, has been recognised by the local authority (LA) for its social inclusion work and is in receipt of an award from the specialist schools' trust for improvements made in 2005 and 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Spennymoor Comprehensive School is a satisfactory school, which is improving well under the clear and focused leadership of the headteacher and the remodelled senior leadership team. Much has been accomplished in tackling the issues identified in the previous inspection report and there is good capacity to improve further. The school enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of parents.

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory with standards at Key Stage 4 now just above national average. Nonetheless, existing weaknesses in students' basic skills, particularly literacy, remain. The school has introduced a range of strategies to tackle this under-achievement and some are now beginning to have a positive effect, most notably in mathematics, where Year 9 results are now above national average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress with the majority achieving appropriately in accordance with their capabilities.

Students' personal development and well being are good. The majority demonstrate a willingness to accept responsibility for their actions and behaviour and this makes the school an orderly place. Students' attitudes in lessons are positive with most demonstrating a strong commitment to their studies and a desire to succeed.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although a proportion is good. However, not enough attention is given by teachers to the learning needs of all students when lessons are being planned and delivered. In addition, the monitoring done by the school's senior and middle leaders does not take enough account of how well students are progressing in their learning. Consequently, while the needs of the majority are usually met, the most able find the work insufficiently challenging and the least able consider it to be too difficult. On occasions, neither group progresses as well as they should.

The curriculum is satisfactory and students are increasingly being offered an appropriate range of course options. The school's specialist technology status is enabling a good range of vocational and work related provision to be provided at Key Stage 4. However, lack of opportunity to develop students' literacy skills across the curriculum is limiting the progress which many make in this important area.

Students appreciate the very good personal care they receive from a dedicated team of staff. Improvements are being made to the monitoring and tracking of students' performance but this information is not used well by teachers. The guidance and support which students receive to improve their work, while satisfactory, is not yet consistent or good enough in all subjects.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory and confirms the schools own accurate self-evaluation. It provides satisfactory value for money.

This small sixth form is a very inclusive, welcoming and friendly place where each student is well known personally and relationships are very good. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and speak very highly of the good personal care they receive.

Students enter the sixth form with broadly average attainment. The majority make satisfactory progress and achieve standards which are in line with national average by the time they leave.

Group sizes are small and consequently examination results tend to vary from year to year. In 2006, however, the majority of students met their targets. They achieved best in psychology, sociology and health and social care and least well in biology and art.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory although some teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of their students. Lessons are lively, there is much challenge and debate and students are expected to take responsibility for their learning. In response, the majority show genuine enthusiasm and are keen to succeed. The pace of learning is slower and progress is limited when teachers talk for too long and dominate lessons. Students show less enthusiasm when this occurs because teachers do not capture their interest or motivate them sufficiently.

Given the small size of the sixth form, students are offered a satisfactory range of academic and vocational courses to meet their needs. The impact of the school's specialist status is reflected in the increasing number of students successfully completing sixth form technology courses.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory and promotes students' personal development well. Students receive adequate academic guidance but this is not yet consistent across all subjects and form tutors are not yet fully involved in this process.

Students' personal development is good and is a strength. Students are given a good range of opportunities to take responsibility through work experience and by contributing to the school and wider community. Consequently, they develop personal and workplace skills well. These qualities, and the good careers advice they receive, allows Spennymoor sixth formers to develop into mature and confident citizens who are well prepared for the world of work or higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in the core subjects.
- Improve the use of assessment information when lessons are being prepared and delivered in order to take account of the needs of all learners.
- Ensure that students have opportunities to develop their literacy skills in all subjects of the curriculum.
- Improve monitoring procedures to ensure that senior and middle leaders take full account of the progress which all students make in their learning.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with broadly average standards from their primary schools. They make satisfactory progress as they move through the school and most achieve in line with national averages by the end of Year 11. Given their capabilities and starting points their achievement is satisfactory.

In the 2006 national tests, overall standards achieved by Year 9 students were in line with national averages. They performed best in mathematics, where results improved from those in

2005, but least well in science where results declined from the previous year. Nonetheless, the majority achieved in line with expectations and school targets were met.

Attainment at GCSE improved in 2006 and is now just above the national average. Almost two thirds of students attained expected grades. However, only half of this number gained these levels when English and mathematics are included and this is well below national average. Students achieved best in food technology, product design and textiles reflecting the impact of the school's specialist technology college status. They achieved least well in history and geography. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because their needs are well known and in the majority of lessons they receive constructive individual help from teachers and teaching assistants. Girls outperform boys in GCSE examinations but the gap between them has narrowed because of successful strategies, to better meet the needs and interests of boys, have been introduced.

Standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science have lagged behind those of other subjects in recent years. However work seen in lessons, improved mathematics results at Key Stage 3 and the results of recent assessments for students in Year 11 all indicate that standards are now beginning to rise.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Most students say they enjoy school and the majority exhibit very positive attitudes towards learning and are keen to succeed. Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average.

Students move around the school in an orderly and safe manner showing due consideration for the needs and safety of others. Their behaviour in lessons is good. A small number of parents consider that some aspects of students' behaviour are a cause for concern. However, students commented that any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with promptly and efficiently by the school and when problems do arise they are well supported by staff.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Students, however, have good opportunities, for example in religious education lessons, to explore important issues confronting them as individuals and society as a whole. They have increasing opportunities to explore other cultures and take part in a range of activities, which support local and national charities. Students have a good sense of right and wrong and have an emerging understanding of positive citizenship and understand how this can be applied through their contribution to the school community.

Students demonstrate a developing knowledge and awareness of how to follow a healthy lifestyle and there is a good take up of healthy food options by those who remain on site during the lunch break. Many take part in sporting events and perform well in competitions. School council students feel they can bring about changes in the school and are proud of the way they have influenced the school's senior leaders in decisions which have been made.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but the school's senior leaders are working hard to make improvements through a well focused training programme. This is proving to be successful and while there is much yet to achieve, a great deal has been accomplished. Teachers now adopt, for example, a consistent approach to lesson planning, which results in well structured activities that interest and motivate students. Most lessons include opportunities for students to work together to solve problems. Relationships between staff and students are good and students' behaviour is well managed so that a positive atmosphere conducive to learning is well established. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ensure that students are aware of what they are expected to learn and the majority show diligence and commitment in completing their tasks. Checks are carried out to ensure that homework is given on a regular basis and that it supports students' learning.

However, in too many lessons, students' progress is limited because teachers are not using assessment information well enough in their planning to match learning activities to the needs of all students. As a consequence, higher attaining students are too often not challenged enough to make the progress of which they are capable. Those of lower ability find the work too demanding and they struggle because tasks are often too difficult. In addition, there are insufficient opportunities to improve students' literacy skills in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Staff are working hard to provide an appropriate range of courses to meet students' needs, interests and abilities, particularly at Key Stage 4. Subject leaders select courses carefully to ensure that students have good opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities, including early entry to some GCSE courses from Year 8 onwards for the most able students. Opportunities to tackle weaknesses in students' literacy skills in other subjects, although developing, are not yet helping to raise standards in English.

The school's specialist status has helped to provide a good range of vocational, technological and work related courses at Key Stage 4. Courses carried out offsite are monitored closely to ensure that students' needs are fully met.

A well planned programme of citizenship and personal, social and health education is contributing to students' good personal development. However, not all students in Key Stage 4 experience the recommended two hours of high quality physical education and school sport each week.

A good proportion of students, including the more able and talented, benefits from the broad range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport. Students particularly appreciate the opportunities for extra revision sessions offered in most subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

This is satisfactory but with significant strengths. Students receive very good care from staff who demonstrate a high degree of commitment to their welfare. All safeguarding procedures are in place and regularly monitored. Partnership working with other agencies is good. In particular, the effective advice and guidance provided for students in Year 11 helps them to make informed decisions about their future learning and career options. The school is improving its tracking procedures for monitoring students' progress, but the guidance and support which they receive to improve their learning lacks consistency. In particular, the marking of students' work and the feedback they receive is not helpful enough in enabling all students to improve. In the few examples where it is good, students receive accurate and detailed guidance about how to progress, but too often comments made by teachers do not demonstrate what students need to do next to make gains to meet their targets. This restricts them in their learning and has over time contributed to the unsatisfactory progress many have made for example in English.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported by staff who have a good understanding of their needs and provide effective individual programmes of work for them. This supports the majority to make satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The headteacher and senior leadership team are effective in providing a strong and clear direction for the work of the school with a secure focus on raising standards. They enjoy the collective support of the staff and together they demonstrate a positive and forceful commitment to make the school successful.

Middle leaders are increasingly held accountable for the performance of their subjects through regular quality assurance surveys and frequent line manager meetings with senior staff. This important work is establishing performance expectations and is helping them to become more effective in leading their departments.

Senior and middle leaders have an increasingly accurate and detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and plans to effect improvement are well targeted and effective. While the regular and systematic monitoring of teaching is leading to improvements, not enough account is taken of how well teachers are providing for the needs of all students when planning lessons or how well students are making progress in their learning.

Governors know the school well and show a keen commitment to see students achieve. The chair of governors, in particular, demonstrates exemplary commitment to his duties and this extends over many years. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their link monitoring visits and from the accurate and detailed reports they receive from staff. This enables the governing body to support the school while offering an appropriate degree of challenge in areas where improvement is required most.

Financial management is good. Spending decisions reflect the school's priorities well and are prioritised at improving the quality of provision for students. The buildings are well maintained and to a high standards. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	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	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	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	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
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?	2	3
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	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	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

18 May 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Spennymoor Comprehensive School, County Durham, DL16 7LN

Thank you for welcoming Mrs. Wallis, Mrs. Salter-Smith, Mr. Self, Mrs. Ling and myself to your school. We very much appreciate the time many of you gave to share your views of the school with us. The purpose of the inspection was to find out what your school does well and the areas that need to improve. The report is now completed and I would like to tell you what it contains.

Spennymoor Comprehensive is an improving school, which provides you with a satisfactory education. A great deal of hard work is being done by Mr. Gillis and his staff to tackle those areas where progress is required and there are many signs that things are getting better.

The standards which you achieve in Years 9, 11 and 13 are now broadly meeting national averages. Well done. However, there are still subjects where standards need to rise further. We were particularly concerned for example that your literacy skills should improve and that you have more opportunities to develop these skills in all subjects across the curriculum.

Your teachers have done much to improve lessons and make them more interesting for you. Most teaching is satisfactory but a proportion is good. However, teachers still need to take more account of the learning needs of all students when they prepare lessons. The needs of all students are not currently being fully met and this limits the progress of which some students are capable. We have asked Mr. Gillis and the senior staff to ensure that they check more thoroughly that this is being done.

We consider, and you confirmed this, that you are very well cared for by the staff. Nonetheless, more support and guidance is required to help you fully understand how to make progress towards meeting your targets so that you all achieve as well as you can.

We were impressed by your attitudes to leading healthy lifestyles and the numbers of students who take advantage of the opportunities to participate in sport. Your behaviour around the school is good and this makes an important contribution to the school's orderly and calm atmosphere we observed during the inspection. Again, well done; the headteacher and staff very much appreciate the responsibility you take for your actions.

Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress. The school has worked really hard to provide students with an appropriate range of subjects to choose from. Students like the atmosphere in the sixth form and feel well supported.

Please thank your parents for providing their views about the school. The very large majority consider the school is doing well and they have confidence in it. We agree with them.

Finally, thank you again for welcoming us into your school and being so helpful. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector