

Morpeth Collingwood School & Media Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122389
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	301664
Inspection dates	10–11 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Margerison

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Nixon
Headteacher	Mrs Cynthia Hetherington
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Stobhillgate Morpeth Northumberland NE61 2HA NE61 2HA
Telephone number	01670 516374
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Age group	4-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Collingwood School and Media Arts College provides for students with moderate learning difficulties. However, a significant proportion of students have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities including severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and social and emotional difficulties. All students have statements of special educational needs. Most students are brought to school and some travel considerable distances to school from across the county. Virtually all students are of White British heritage. Two thirds of students are boys. The school gained Specialist Arts College status in September 2006 and is involved in a number of projects and partnerships with other schools and providers that reflect its specialist status. These include being a Creative Partnership school involved in a curriculum development project. The school is federated with the local high school, King Edward VI, which will enable it to provide education from September 2007 for students over 16 who have learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school, which values the uniqueness of individuals so that students make excellent gains in their learning. Central to its success is the ethos of teamwork that permeates throughout the school. Exceptional relationships between students and adults underpin all of its work. This is the result of outstanding leadership and management at all levels in the school, but most importantly due to the headteacher and senior managers who have an innovative and dynamic perspective on how their school should serve the needs of students, parents and the local community. This is reflected in the exceptionally accurate view that the school has of its own work. As a result, the school has made excellent progress since the last inspection.

Students' achievement is outstanding. From a low base when students join the school, they make excellent progress. In Key Stages 1 and 2, students make very rapid gains in their basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Progress is particularly good in reading and number. They continue to progress extremely well in Years 7 to 9 so that they are really well placed to start on accredited courses in Year 10. As a result, at the end of Year 11, all students gain a wide breadth of external qualifications at a range of levels. A good proportion leave the school with at least four GCSEs and a raft of additional qualifications.

Students' personal development is excellent. They love being at school so attendance is good. They are really enthusiastic in everything they do. Behaviour is outstanding, which is why the atmosphere throughout the school is relaxed, yet productive. Students have a very secure understanding of how to stay safe and live a healthy lifestyle. As a result, they are exceptionally well prepared for moving on to the next phase of their lives. They make a good contribution to the school community through the school council, but given their excellent speaking skills and their perceptive view of their school, there is more scope for them to be more directly involved in school development and self-review.

Students' progress is directly due to the exceptionally high quality of teaching and learning across the school. It is the consistency of the teaching that is one of the key factors. As a result, at no point does students' progress slow significantly. Teachers and support staff form very strong teams in each class and their skills frequently complement each other really well so that students of all abilities are equally challenged by the activities in lessons. One student captured the most important ingredient that characterises the whole school's approach to learning; 'Teachers make lessons exciting and fun, but they push us too.' The curriculum is outstanding, but recently, the school has made significant improvements to the curriculum to reflect its specialist status. Even more 'excitement' has been introduced to lessons through drama, music and the arts, which are beginning to have a really positive effect on students' achievement, their creativity and appreciation of the world. However, the school is not complacent and it is continuing to develop its provision through partnerships with other schools and other organisations; such as, its provision for post-16 students, the range of courses on offer in Key Stage 4 and the opportunities for sport. The level of support and guidance provided for students is excellent, which is reflected in parents overwhelming endorsement of this aspect of the school's work.

Given students' desire for learning and the shared vision among all those involved with the school, it is in a very strong position to improve further and drive through the current initiatives in the school improvement plan.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the opportunities for students to contribute to school self-review and improvement planning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students' achievement, irrespective of their gender, learning difficulty or disability, is outstanding. From a well below average starting point when they join the school, they make exceptional progress. By the end of Year 11, all students gain an extremely good range of externally accredited qualifications including Entry Level and full GCSEs as well as various vocational and work related certificates. This year, several more able students are working at GCSE level in English, mathematics, science and design and technology. This is a good improvement since 2006 when only GCSE mathematics was offered.

The very positive effect of the school's specialist status on students' progress is seen throughout the school and across the curriculum. Many of the examples of older students' art work where they use different media and materials, often involving information and communication technology (ICT) are of an extremely high standard. For example, they learn to make films, manipulate digital photographs and link images to poetry and music. In Key Stages 1 and 2, they make the best gains in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. This is particularly the case in reading where some students make progress at a similar rate to students in mainstream school. However, this is not to the detriment of other aspects of their learning; such as ICT, in which they make good progress. In Key Stage 3, students continue to extend their skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects so that, relative to their ability, students are very competent readers, writers and mathematicians. They also have a good grasp of a broad range of ICT skills, which helps them present their work in many different ways, including multi-media presentations. As a result, they are extremely well prepared for starting on externally accredited courses in Year 10.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They love coming to school and are full of praise and enthusiasm for their school and everything it offers. This is partly reflected in students' good attendance. In lessons, they are really keen to take part in activities or discussions. Their confidence and willingness to express their opinions and to discuss them with each other is very impressive. What is particularly notable is that students have great respect for each other and accept that others do not always agree and accept other people's points of view as constructive comments. This exemplifies the outstanding relationships evident throughout the school at all levels, which is one of the strongest factors that underpin the success of the school. Students have an outstanding understanding of how to look after themselves and to lead healthy lifestyles. In fact, after school sporting activities are oversubscribed despite most students living a significant distance from the school. Students make a good contribution to the wider community in a good number of ways and they are making an increasingly effective contribution to the school through the school council, which is a lively forum for debate and is proactive in its role. The school has adopted many of the council's suggestions, but there is more scope for students to be more involved in the school's self evaluation procedures and whole school improvement, including

teaching and learning. Given their very good basic skills, experience of vocational activities and self-confidence, students are exceptionally well prepared for moving on to the next phase of their lives. This is shown by the fact that all of the current Year 11 students are intending to continue in education next year, most at Collingwood School through its link with King Edward VI School.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The extremely strong teamwork between teachers and support staff are at the heart of this. As a result, staff are flexible in their arrangements for grouping students so that activities meet the needs of all students exceptionally well. The contribution of support staff to the pace of students' learning cannot be over emphasised. They are skilled and knowledgeable educators in their own right with a really secure subject knowledge and understanding of the needs of the students they teach. Typically, activities in lessons are practical and frequently rooted in students' own experiences and often drawing on things students have done in other lessons. There is a wealth of opportunities to reinforce students' basic skills in all lessons. Teachers and support staff use different questioning techniques very effectively to involve students in lessons; this is a major contributory factor to students' self-confidence and very good speaking and listening skills. ICT is used extremely well as a teaching and learning tool.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and has improved greatly since the last inspection. Partly due to the specialist status of the school, the breadth of curriculum in the creative and performing arts has increased dramatically, which really enriches students' learning in many ways throughout the school. The range of external qualifications has also increased a lot recently and the school is currently exploring ways of developing them further, particularly into art and design and ICT, which reflect its specialist status. The extension of the school's work into the post-16 sector from September of this year is another very good example of how the school is constantly striving to improve the opportunities available for its students. The curriculum is enhanced really well by links with various external specialists. In addition, the range of sports and after-school activities is continually expanding. This year the school has been involved in a project through the Creative Partnership to revise the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to link subjects together to further increase the coherence of the learning experiences for students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Two thirds of parents responded to the inspection through the questionnaire and virtually without exception, they all agreed, most strongly, that their children were extremely well cared for. Inspection evidence supports their view that this aspect of the school's work is outstanding. All requirements for ensuring students health and safety, including safeguarding them against risk, fully meet requirements. Students' academic and personal progress is assessed and tracked extremely thoroughly. The information is used very well to make sure students are making the progress they should and to set them targets for learning. Students are involved to some degree

in this process. The school works extremely well with external support agencies to make sure that students are provided with the guidance they need in order to make the right choices about themselves and their futures. Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) make a very important contribution to the quality of specialist provision; such as, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy provided for students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher and senior managers have a crystal clear vision for the school. They have very successfully created a climate of mutual respect and an extremely strong sense of teamwork across the whole school that not only includes adults but students as well. Governors are extremely active participants in the process of school development and evaluation. They have established a very systematic and sharply focused approach to checking how new initiatives are being implemented and the effect on students' learning. As a result, they have an extremely clear understanding of the strengths of the school and where it is going next. Similarly, those staff responsible for different subjects and aspects of the school exercise their responsibilities extremely well. It is this high level of commitment and confidence in each other, coupled with the willingness of senior managers to drive through highly innovative and creative approaches to enhancing students' learning that has led to the excellent progress since the last inspection. The school provides outstanding 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
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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 July 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Morpeth Collingwood School & Media Arts College, Morpeth, NE61 2HA

Thank you for welcoming me to your school this week when I came to do the inspection.

I am pleased to tell you that I think you go to an outstanding school. At the heart of your school are the extremely strong relationships you have with each other and the way that you all and this includes all the staff, work together as one big team. You are taught extremely well so that you learn really well. The range of activities and different experiences you have are excellent, which makes school great fun and very enjoyable. You are really well cared for and helped by staff to do your best. As a result, you develop exceptionally well as individuals and are very well prepared for moving on when you leave Collingwood. I was also impressed by your contribution to the school through your school council. All of this is due to the outstanding way that your school is managed and organised by your headteacher and the rest of the staff.

The staff and governors know exactly how they are going to make your school even better, but I think that you could be more involved in discussing what are the best things about your school and how it could be improved.

I really enjoyed my visit and because of your excellent behaviour and enthusiasm for learning, you were a credit to your school, yourselves and your parents.

Best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Andy Margerison

Lead inspector