

Whitcliffe Mount Specialist Business and Enterprise College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107780
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309504
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1315
6th form	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Kath Pinnock
Headteacher	Mr John McGee
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Turnsteads Avenue Cleckheaton West Yorkshire BD19 3AQ
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Age group	13-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The college is larger than average and the vast majority of students are White British. Very few students leave the college other than at the usual times. The proportion of students claiming free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased with each intake and now matches the national average. Most students come from five middle schools which are in an education improvement partnership with Whitcliffe Mount. An executive headteacher oversees and supports the work of a federation that also includes two of the middle schools. The college has specialist business and enterprise status, a Healthy Schools award, and is a Football Association Charter School. For its improved GCSE results over a three-year period, the college became a member of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust 'Most improved schools club'. The local authority plans a future reorganisation such that the college will eventually cater for students from age 11.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whitcliffe Mount is a satisfactory and improving college with some good features. It takes students at age 13, so that they have only a short time before they sit national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. Realising this, and responding to comment in the last inspection report, the college has been active and successful in leading the formation of much closer links with its feeder middle schools. A much improved curriculum and greater awareness of how students will best learn across Key Stage 3 has accelerated students' rates of progress.

Starting from below average standards in both Year 9 and on entry to the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress and usually reach below average but gradually improving standards. However, the pace of achievement at Key Stage 4 has slowed and the college accepts the need to improve on this. Results in English have improved across the board, apart from an unaccountable drop in the Key Stage 3 test results in 2007. Mathematics results have not kept up with those in English, partly because of past staffing issues. Standards in science across the college are not good enough and too many students underachieve in the subject. There have been staffing and leadership difficulties but the main problem relates to teaching, which is not good enough because too little is expected of students. Circumstances combined to make 2007 results in the sixth form a disappointment. Too many learners made too little progress on their post-16 courses. The college has identified what needed to be done and has taken steps to improve this situation, including reviewing the suitability of courses and whether learners' progress is good enough.

More stress on regular attendance and the application of an agreed system of managing behaviour have resulted in a better atmosphere around the college and in lessons. In general, students are polite, thoughtful of others and sensible. These positive attitudes extend into most lessons but too many students expect too little of themselves in terms of work and attention. Teaching is satisfactory but too few lessons are stimulating enough to grab students' attention and make them want to work hard. Senior staff rely on a checking system for lessons which is regular but not rigorous enough in terms of how it expects teachers to teach, nor clear enough about what helps students learn best.

In contrast, there is a clear and consistent view of how to care for and support students. This enables good support for all, and especially those experiencing difficulty. Students feel safe and grow in confidence. They value the regular feedback they get about how they are getting on in their subjects and use their targets as a means of measuring their progress. This good system is not as effective as it should be because teachers' marking is inconsistent and targets for higher attainers are not reviewed often enough.

The college has worked hard and successfully to match the curriculum more closely to what students want and need. This has seen accelerated and early-start GCSE courses in Key Stage 3 and more vocational and alternative courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The result is a genuine attempt to cater for students, also seen in low exclusion rates and the provision of the 'Bridge' project and Access room where students are encouraged to catch up or keep up with work.

The headteacher and senior team work well together and have enabled the college to improve. They have a very clear idea of how the college can and should develop and this is set out clearly in various planning documents. A good feature is the regular, detailed evaluation of performance and how it is improving because of planned changes. This meant that the college was highly

accurate in judging its performance prior to the inspection. However, some main messages, such as the drop in the rate of students' progress in Years 10 and 11, were not always highlighted. The college does not set tight enough targets against which to measure progress in some aspects of its work.

Specialist status is having a positive impact on the college and the wider local community. It has been used to improve resources and facilities, to increase uptake for a wider range of business-relevant courses and to provide training for local firms. There are especially good links with the local business community so that students get real opportunities to cost, design and evaluate goods and services. The specialism is carefully managed and has measurably raised standards in the specialist subjects. Despite considerable work, it has not yet fully succeeded in driving standards up across the whole college. Students see it as a sixth form or specialist subject initiative rather than as an important influence across all subjects.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. The sixth form is growing in size because recent developments in the curriculum give access to a good range of A level courses and a growing selection of vocational programmes. The focus on business-related courses is appropriate to the college's specialism. Traditionally satisfactory, achievement declined in 2007, as evidenced in results. The college has taken swift action to turn things around and early indications of success are encouraging. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, though teachers do not make enough use of students sharing their ideas with one another. Effective systems are used to set targets and to monitor progress. Students value this but believe that some targets are not challenging enough. They value the good level of support and guidance that they receive and the opportunities they have for participating in many activities outside lessons. They respond well to the responsibilities they are offered in the college, and the older students provide good role models for younger students. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as is value for money. There is good capacity for further improvement. The steps taken to improve provision for students have increased numbers following courses but have not yet had time to impact on standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate students' rate of progress at Key Stage 4.
- Improve GCSE and post-16 results in science.
- Monitor teaching and learning far more rigorously, so that many more lessons are interesting and suitably challenging.
- Ensure that development plans include clear and measurable criteria by which improvement can be checked.

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 join the college in the last year of Key Stage 3 with standards which are below average. Their achievement is satisfactory and improving over successive years. However, results show that this has been because of quicker progress in Year 9 than in Key Stage 4, where the rate of progress declined. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection. Though the proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSE grades remains below average, targets have been met. In 2007, improvements in GCSE English results were not matched in mathematics and science. Girls did less well than boys. Average ability boys and students with a statement of special educational need made good progress, but some of the more able boys tended to underachieve. Targets for specialist areas were met at Key Stage 3 in mathematics but not in information and communication technology (ICT) where results were satisfactory but could not meet unrealistic targets. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form all specialist courses met or exceeded targets except mathematics at GCSE, where staffing turbulence had a negative impact. Students' achievement in science in all key stages is poor.

Over recent years, sixth form learners' results have shown satisfactory progress from their below average starting points. However, 2007 results were a major disappointment for the college, with underachievement in a number of subject areas. Best performance was in English both at AS and A level, continuing a pattern of success. As in previous years, students did least well in science. Following a review of sixth form performance, factors such as mediocre teaching, some over-small groups, inappropriate courses and a temporary management gap were identified. Steps have been taken to remedy matters including improving management, widening vocational offers and cutting back less popular or successful courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy their education, as shown by their politeness and consideration for others. They quickly settle into college routines. Bullying is rare and students are confident that it is swiftly and effectively dealt with. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Movement around the building is calm and orderly. While the majority of students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, there is low-level disruption in some lessons and inattention in too many others. Nonetheless, students have good relationships with staff and each other. They respond well to group and practical work, being sensible and aware of the need to be alert to hazards. Attendance has improved and is close to average. Students are keen on the wide range of opportunities beyond the classroom, for instance experience in the workplace through strong links with the local business community. Careers fairs and enterprise days with a topical theme involve all students. They feel well prepared for the world of work. Most students take part in a variety of sporting activities. They have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives. They make a positive contribution to the local community, organising seasonal events, collaborating with the residents' association on projects and raising funds for charities. The college council is active in influencing developments in the college and is capable of taking on an even greater role. The work of the college on aspects of global citizenship and international relations through practical links with schools in a variety of countries is a strength.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students are helped by an agreed approach to lesson planning which is used consistently. Teachers offer a range of activities designed to involve students in their learning. However, too many lessons, while satisfactory in terms of management and organisation, are pedestrian. The work provided is too often lacklustre and not challenging enough, particularly for the most able students. Trying to be helpful, some teachers offer too much information so that students spend too little time learning for themselves and their minds wander because they lose interest. Over-long starter activities can lead to a lack of pace. Inattention too often goes unchecked and in a minority of lessons behaviour is not well managed. Teachers' marking of students' work is inconsistent. While much marking is regular and very helpful, some is inadequate in telling students how to improve. A minority of books checked had not been marked for months. In the best lessons, teachers use questions purposefully to ascertain what students know and to challenge them to extend their thinking. Students are encouraged to discuss ideas together and to assess one another's work. Teaching assistants are used well to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching in the specialist areas of ICT and business is often good, but is not yet being sufficiently used to stimulate improved teaching across the college.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good and continues to develop rapidly to cater better for the needs and interests of students. Departments work closely with middle schools to ensure that courses started in Year 7 mesh in with Year 9 work. There is good planning for an early start to GCSE courses. Pathways, with various combinations of academic and vocational courses, allow increasingly appropriate choices for students in Years 10 to 13. The widened range of examination courses in business and ICT at Key Stage 4 are a good reflection of the college's specialism. However, provision for ICT for up to one third of students in Years 10 and 11 is sketchy. The college has realised this and development planning shows that all students will have a Key Stage 4 ICT course from next September. For students with learning or behavioural difficulties, a more personalised curriculum is provided. The 'Bridge' project and Access room benefit students who are having difficulties, and offer good support for a return to mainstream lessons.

Enterprise education influences much of what students do. Vocational courses are responsive to the needs of local employment. Careers education and work experience are well planned. A wide range of enterprise activities, including enterprise days and themes, support students' personal and academic development. An excellent Sports' Leaders programme sees students work in the community. High numbers of students take part in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care in the college is good because staff know students well and there are regular reviews of students' progress. Students find teachers approachable, supportive and genuinely interested in their welfare. Risk assessments are thorough so that the college is a safe place where students feel secure. Mentoring and the work of pastoral support staff help all students, particularly those experiencing personal or learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A range of effective intervention strategies are tailored to meet the needs of students. The college works well with parents and external agencies to provide good pastoral care and appropriate information about career pathways. Child protection and health and safety practices meet statutory requirements. The proportion of parents returning questionnaires was small, but findings matched those of the college that the majority are well satisfied with how students are treated and the progress they are making. Guidance to students about their academic progress is regular and helpful, but targets for some students are not reviewed regularly enough to be sufficiently challenging.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Satisfactory leadership and management have seen the college making progress since the last report. The headteacher and senior staff are very committed to helping all students get the best from their time in college. Improved systems for checking attendance, minimising classroom behaviour and finding alternatives to exclusion have worked well. However, after significant rises in standards, the rate of improvement in terms of the progress students make has slowed down in Key Stage 4. Standards in science across the college are too low. The college has successfully managed staffing issues in mathematics to minimise underachievement. The college evaluates its own performance effectively and accurately. Development planning is thorough and thoughtful but often lacks clear measures to check progress. Middle managers are taking more responsibility for subject performance and teaching quality. However, senior leaders have not been demanding enough in terms of laying down what makes a good lesson. Improvements to middle leadership have been made in, for example, English and art and these are already resulting in students being more motivated in these lessons and achieving higher standards.

Governors know the college well and are effective in asking the right questions to help its direction and progress. The college offers satisfactory value for money. Leadership shows good capacity to improve because it sees issues clearly and plans well for improvement. This is apparent in the way senior leaders have acted successfully to work with feeder schools to ensure greater consistency in the quality of education that students receive prior to entry in Year 9. This is helping to accelerate students' progress across Key Stage 3 and bodes well for the future.

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

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

Thank you for helping us in our work by being polite, and so helpful and willing to talk about your experience of college.

Your college is satisfactory and improving. It is doing a good job in helping you to gain the confidence and skills needed to go out into the world, and you enjoy and appreciate this. Your progress in subjects is satisfactory, as seen in the results you achieve. It is not better than this because lessons, while being well organised and planned, can be dull and lacking in interest. Partly because of this, too many of you become inattentive, though serious misbehaviour is rare. The college has worked hard and been successful in linking what you learn in middle school with what happens in Year 9. You are responding well to the wider choice of courses now available for GCSE and in the sixth form. The headteacher, senior staff and governors work very hard and are careful to keep a close eye on how effective the college is and how it can be improved further.

In order for the college to improve further we have asked the headteacher and governors to:

- help you to make quicker progress in Years 10 and 11
- make sure that you reach better standards in science
- encourage teachers to make lessons more interesting, varied and demanding so that you are more involved in your work
- check in more detail that lessons are good enough to help you make quicker progress.

You can help by showing a sense of urgency to succeed on your Key Stage 4 courses; making a special effort in science in all years, including the sixth form; and by being more attentive in lessons generally, and willing to try out new ways of doing things.