

Norham Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108628
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309750
Inspection dates	12–13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	746
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Newsham
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Halbert
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Alnwick Avenue North Shields Tyne and Wear NE29 7BU
Telephone number	0191 2005062
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Norham Community Technology College is smaller in size than the average secondary school. It is situated in an area of North Tyneside that experiences a significant degree of social and economic disadvantage and a considerably higher than average number of students are entitled to free school meals. Most students come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school manages a communication resource base for 26 students and this increases the proportion of students with statements of special educational need to well above the national average. Ten students are in the care of the local council. The school was reaccredited as a specialist technology college in 2006 and holds the Investor in People Award and the Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Norham is a good college with some outstanding features. It has successfully developed a strong inclusive atmosphere where all students thrive; they are valued, respected and supported. Good relationships permeate the college and students' spiritual, social, moral, cultural, personal development and well-being are good because of the excellent care and support provided by staff. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, together with the support of a committed senior leadership team, provides a very clear direction for the college's improvement. Staff are successful in their work to overcome the barriers to learning that some students face because of the social deprivation in the area. Standards are improving at Key Stage 3. Although they remain below average, the gap between the college's performance and that of other schools nationally is narrowing, particularly in English. Standards are also rising at Key Stage 4 in the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving high passes in at least five GCSEs; the gap between the national average and the college has narrowed by nearly 10% in the last two years. However, the proportion achieving five GCSEs including English and mathematics remains low. The school has been quick to take action to reverse the dip in mathematics results in 2007. College tracking information indicates the school is well on the way to meet their challenging 2008 targets. The school is well placed to continue to drive up standards and achievement and consequently has good capacity to improve further.

The college has worked relentlessly to develop a 'culture for learning'. As a result, students make good progress during their time at college when taking into account their starting points and when compared to similar students nationally. They make faster progress in Years 10 and 11. This is partly because of the impact of interventions at Key Stage 3 to improve their literacy skills and partly because of the wide range of courses available at Key Stage 4 which are well matched to students' needs and interests. These actions enable students to remain well motivated and achieve well. Students who are in the care of the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are supported in the communication resource base, make good progress due to the high quality support and guidance they receive. As one parent said, 'Communication resource base staff are excellent. The support and pastoral care is brilliant!'

As part of its specialist technology status, the college has developed outstanding links with local business, Connexions, the local skills centre, further education college, and partners from local universities. These links have helped to improve facilities, enhance the curriculum and raise students' aspirations, confidence and self-esteem. Students access a wide range of vocational opportunities that also promotes their enterprise and entrepreneurial skills and prepare them well for their future lives. Consequently, an increasing number of students who leave college at 16 continue their education or enter employment or training. Specialist subject targets have been broadly met and the college has worked tirelessly to improve their involvement in the local community. The good curriculum is also enhanced well through a very wide range of extended activities available in school and the local community.

The quality of teaching is good overall. The college's determination to improve teaching and learning is making a difference to its quality. This includes looking outward in search of best practice through, for example, close partnerships with a local 'leading edge school' and other specialist technology colleges. The majority of lessons are good. Teachers are using a good range of information and data to track students' achievements and to plan the next steps in learning. There remain pockets of inconsistency in a minority of lessons when higher ability students are not always sufficiently challenged or when teachers' feedback to students does

not give them a clear enough picture of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. Senior and middle managers are working closely with staff to extend the good practice that exists, across the whole college, so that every student can achieve their best.

Excellent partnerships and good relationships with outside organisations support the care and achievement of vulnerable students and those at risk of being excluded well. Successful efforts have been made to increase the involvement of parents in the life of the college, and in their own and in their children's learning. The varied extended schools programme, parental questionnaires, regular newsletters, use of family support workers, and parent consultation days all support effective communications between home and college. Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of leadership, care and education provided by the college. A small minority consider the behaviour of students is an area of concern. Whilst it is clear that some students display challenging behaviour, this is generally well managed and the behaviour of the majority of students in classes and around the college was good during the inspection. There have been no permanent exclusions for the past three years and the number of fixed-term exclusions is very low. The majority of students enjoy college and their attendance is improving since the introduction of more robust action to tackle the small proportion of non-attenders; attendance is now satisfactory. Liaison with primary schools is strong and includes excellent transition arrangements to smooth entry into Year 7.

Governors provide effective challenge and support to the headteacher, senior managers and staff. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Managers, governors, staff and students are now fully involved in the college's self-evaluation processes. All have a clear view of the college's strengths and areas for development as a result of rigorous monitoring and evaluation strategies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all is at least good.
- Consistently challenge all higher ability students to achieve their best.
- Provide all students with effective feedback to help them understand how well they are doing and what else they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' enter school with standards that are well below the national average; particularly standards in reading. Standards at the end of Year 9 remain below average but the trend is one of improvement. Standards at Key Stage 4 are also rising and are satisfactory overall. The college has worked effectively over the past three years to address weaknesses in the English curriculum and improve students' literacy skills. There has been good improvement in the proportion of students attaining the level expected for their age in English in Year 9 and good improvement in the number attaining higher levels. There has also been an improvement in the number achieving higher levels in mathematics and science.

Students make good progress during their time in college and achieve well by the time they leave at 16. There are no significant differences between the progress of girls and boys, or the small number of students from ethnic minority communities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say they enjoy coming to college, especially when lessons are practical, relevant and interesting. They usually work hard and are friendly, polite and supportive of one another. Students say they feel safe and secure in school. Although they indicate that a small proportion of lessons are disrupted by a minority of students who act immaturely, these disruptions are dealt with swiftly and consistently. Students comment that whilst there are occasionally bullying and racist incidents, robust action is taken. They appreciate there is always someone to turn to for help in times of need, either adults or increasingly other students who are trained to support them. They know how to stay healthy; eat healthy lunches and welcome the many opportunities to take exercise within and outside the school day. Students say they like technology and speak enthusiastically about the regular 'focus days' and Tuesday afternoon '25th hour activities' which involve them in activities that support all areas of their personal and academic development. They also enjoy regular 'enterprise education' days and opportunities such as 'technology week' that are rooted in technology and provide an emphasis on cross curricular learning. Good opportunities enable students to make an excellent contribution to the college 'family' and links with the local and worldwide community are outstanding. They are confident advocates for their school. For example, through their good work with the school council, they have secured significant funding to improve the school's playing fields. School representatives on the local youth council are involved in actions to improve facilities for young people across North Tyneside. They care deeply about those less fortunate than themselves and regularly raise funds to help them. Especially noteworthy is students' support to provide irrigation for an Eritrean village.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Common to all lessons are good relationships, good lesson planning, secure subject knowledge and clear instructions from the teacher. These aspects create a positive environment in which learning can and does take place; students work hard and show good levels of concentration. Teachers use skilful questioning to stimulate learning and to encourage students to develop their ideas. In the best lessons teachers regularly check that students understand what is expected of them and to let them know if they are being successful. In most lessons, students know their targets and what they need to do to improve. They respond well to the challenges presented to them. However in some lessons, students are less clear about what they need to do to improve and higher attaining students are not always challenged enough. Despite this, students are still generally well behaved and work quietly on their tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum, including the extensive extra-curricular activities and the strong provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make a substantial contribution to students' good personal development and their high levels of enjoyment. Improvements since the previous inspection have led to increased provision for music and information and communication technology, and strengthened support in literacy and numeracy, especially for vulnerable and underachieving groups. Specialist school status in technology

enables all students to take technology and other courses which match their needs and interests. Partnerships with other educational and training establishments have successfully increased the choice of courses at Key Stage 4 to include construction and engineering; both of which are popular. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education or training through the emphasis on key skills and perceptive and helpful careers guidance.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care and support are outstanding, particularly in how the college meets students' diverse and complex needs and takes its extended school provision into the whole community. Key members of staff know students well and are greatly skilled in supporting them and addressing their needs. Students at risk of being disengaged with learning are supported well and successful action is taken to involve and re-engage them with their education; especially in the outstanding provision in the Amble Close annexe which provides one-to-one educational support to vulnerable young people. An excellent personal, social and health education programme is successfully supporting students' personal and emotional development. Students' mental and emotional well-being is also supported very effectively through regular 'onsite' help from health professionals and counsellors. The health and safety of all students are paramount and all statutory child protection and safeguarding requirements are met.

Close social and academic links with the local primary schools, college and training agencies ensure students are ready for their next phase of education. Reports to parents are clear and informative about their child's progress and include targets for improvement. Good guidance and tracking processes to identify students' achievements and progress have been developed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is highly regarded within the local community and by educational and other partners across the area for her unrelenting work to promote the inclusion and involvement of students in the college and in the local community. She is well supported by enthusiastic senior and middle managers and together they share the commitment to raise students' aspirations and achievement. Senior and middle managers understand what is expected of them, say they feel valued and empowered to take decisions and are increasingly accountable for the performance in their areas of responsibility. The school is building on improvements made over recent years, as seen by the good progress students make in their learning by the time they leave school. Effective action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of leadership across the school. This includes sharing the good practice present in school and looking outward to good practitioners locally and nationally. The budget is managed well. Resources are used creatively to provide an effective learning 'climate' and value for money is good.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
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 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	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

17 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Norham Community Technology College, North Tyneside,
NE29 7BU

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your school recently. We were impressed with your behaviour, friendliness and helpfulness as we went around the school. You were a credit to the school. We agree with the overwhelming majority of parents who sent in the pre-inspection questionnaires; that the school provides you with a good quality education. In fact we think the leadership of the headteacher and the care and support you receive is outstanding. We are pleased to see that more of you are attending regularly and glad to hear that many of you who spoke to us, say you enjoyed school. Students in need of help are well supported and there are many adults in school who you can turn to in times of need. The headteacher and staff are working hard to ensure that all of you are included into the life of the school. The curriculum is good and many of you value the subjects that have been developed as part of the school's technology status, and the wide range of activities you can take part in outside the school day. Many of you make an outstanding contribution to your school and the local community. You are powerful and confident advocates for other each other and students in the community through for example, your work on the school council, youth council and the work with North Tyneside Council to improve the area around your school.

Most of you are working hard in lessons and as a result of this and the good teaching overall, are making good progress from the time you enter school to the time you leave when you are 16. You are provided with good advice to help you make choices to prepare you for the time you move from school into college or training. Although some of you say that there is sometimes misbehaviour in a minority of lessons that can cause some disruption, you also say that swift action is taken to make sure that you are not disturbed for long.

You, the school, and the inspectors are aware that there are still a few lessons where teaching is not as good as the best. We have therefore asked the governors, headteacher and managers to keep working to ensure that all lessons are of high quality so that all of you, including higher ability students achieve the best you can. We have also asked them to ensure that the information you receive about your progress is always clear so you all know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve further.

Thank you once again for your welcome. Keep up the good work and continue to try hard and enjoy your time at school.

Best regards

Margaret Farrow HMI