

Millom School - A Specialist Technology and Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112388
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310877
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	732
6th form	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Colin Richards
Headteacher	Mr Ian Smith
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2003
School address	Salthouse Road Millom Cumbria LA18 5AB
Telephone number	01229 772300
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Millom is a smaller-than-average secondary school. It has had Technology College status since 2000 and a second specialism in the Arts from September 2004. It draws its students from the small town of Millom and a large part of rural west Cumbria. An average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups and none has English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above average. The school has Football Association chartered status and Artsmark Silver and Healthy School awards. It has been designated by the local authority as an extended school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing, or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory. Students enter Year 7 with average standards in English, mathematics and science but, because they make inadequate progress as they move through the school, they leave with below-average standards at the end of Year 11. Although there was a slight rise in the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, overall the school's GCSE results have shown a downward trend over the last three years. Despite a small improvement in test results at Key Stage 3 in 2007, these remained below average. School data indicates that Key Stage 3 students' achievement remained in the bottom 4% nationally. Students achieved better in mathematics than in English and science.

Students are underachieving because too much teaching is inadequate and not enough is good or better. Despite frequent monitoring by senior leaders improvement is slow. Good practice has been identified but this is not being shared sufficiently to improve students' learning. Too many lessons lack the pace and challenge needed to ensure that students remain interested, stay on task and make the progress they should. Students' behaviour is satisfactory around the school but the behaviour of a minority of students deteriorates in lessons where teaching fails to engage or motivate them.

Students' personal development and well-being, the care, guidance and support they receive and the curriculum they study are all satisfactory. The school has been successful in improving attendance, which is now above average, and in significantly reducing exclusions. Most students have satisfactory attitudes to learning and say they enjoy those lessons where the work is varied, interesting and practical and where clear expectations and routines promote good behaviour. Students say they feel safe and are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. They are given many opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the community. There is a strong concern for students' welfare. The school ensures that all students, and particularly those who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, receive the care and pastoral support they need. Academic guidance, though improving, is not sufficiently consistent to ensure that all students know how to improve their work.

Over three quarters of those parents who returned questionnaires expressed a very supportive view of the school's work. They feel that the school is well led and managed, that behaviour is good and their children are happy, safe and well cared for and that they generally make good progress.

Despite a strong commitment to improving the school, leadership and management are inadequate. Senior leaders and managers are working hard to halt the downward trend in students' achievement. They are monitoring the work of the school regularly, but this is not effective because of the lack of rigour and involvement of middle managers. Senior leaders have also introduced new systems and procedures, for example, to monitor students' progress and improve the pace of their learning. These systems are not sufficiently refined or being consistently and rigorously applied to be effective in raising standards and achievement. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining good teachers have added to the school's problems and

have contributed to the lack of continuity in students' learning and a lack of leadership in English.

The school has forged good links with the community and with other schools, particularly in its capacity as both a specialist Arts and Technology College and as an extended school. The local community makes good use of the schools resources, for example those in the network centre.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Despite standards which are below average, students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their starting points. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. New leadership and management have resulted in some improvements, particularly in the tracking and monitoring of students' progress. Better guidance is reducing the number of students who embark on unsuitable courses, and retention rates are improving. This work has yet to have a secure impact on raising standards, though progress in the current Year 13 is improving, with most students on course to reach or exceed their targets. Only those students who are suited to traditional academic courses are at present well served by the curriculum but there are plans to introduce further alternatives to AS and A level courses. Students enjoy their experience in the sixth form. They feel well supported by their subject teachers and tutors. There is an active sixth-form committee and many students are ready to take responsibility for planning and organising events and activities throughout the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in English and science.
- Increase the pace and challenge in lessons and ensure that poor behaviour does not disrupt the learning.
- Ensure the rigorous and consistent implementation of new policies and systems to raise achievement.
- Improve the rigour and effectiveness with which leaders and managers at all levels monitor the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are below average and achievement is inadequate. In 2006, Year 9 national test results were below average and students underachieved compared to their starting points. Key Stage 3 test results improved slightly in 2007 but were still below average. Value-added data indicates that overall students underachieved. Students achieved best in mathematics but underachieved in English and science.

The school's GCSE results were below average in 2006 and overall fell slightly in 2007. The percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades fell further below the national average. However there was a slight rise in the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English. Given their starting points, students made insufficient progress and underachieved at Key Stage 4.

There is no difference in the achievement of any group of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Challenging targets were not met. Specialist college targets were

met in art and in design and technology but not in English, mathematics and science. Students performed least well in GCSE information and communication technology (ICT) in 2007. Current progress in lessons and students' achievement over time are inadequate, particularly in the core subjects of English and science. The school's own tracking of students' progress shows that a significant number are not reaching the expected levels for their ages. The school's capacity to maintain recent small improvements in achievement at Key Stage 3 is threatened by inadequacies in the quality of teaching, especially in science, and by a lack of leadership in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students are keen to do well, enjoy learning and are prepared to work hard, particularly when they are engaged and challenged by the teaching and understand what it is they are learning and why. Students' attendance is well monitored and promoted by the school and is above average. Behaviour in and around school is satisfactory. Students generally get on well with each other and with staff. They have some concerns about bullying, but they trust adults to take them seriously. The majority of parents regard the behaviour of students as good. However, a small minority of parents expressed concerns about inappropriate behaviour of some pupils in a few lessons; this has some justification because behaviour deteriorates in a minority of lessons. Revised approaches to managing behaviour are succeeding, for example, in significantly reducing the use of exclusion as a sanction. Students make positive contributions to the school and wider community and value the opportunity to serve on the developing school council. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory. Students understand the importance of staying healthy and safe. Many students benefit from the emphasis given to work experience and work-related learning. Careers advice, enterprise activities, and the very positive links with local employers provide a thorough foundation for the preparation of students for their adult lives. However, weaknesses in basic skills, particularly literacy, remain a factor that restricts students' choices in further education and training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are inadequate because they are not of sufficient quality to bring about a significant improvement in students' achievement. Too few lessons are good and too many are inadequate. The agreed elements of effective teaching are set out in the school's own 'good lesson guide' but they are not sufficiently well established across the school. Most lessons are no better than satisfactory because students are not challenged sufficiently and progress is often leisurely.

Where teaching is stimulating, students are willing to learn and display positive attitudes. However, in lessons which have not been prepared in sufficient depth to meet the needs and interests of all students and if teachers do not have effective management skills, a minority of students lose interest and behaviour deteriorates to the point where learning is affected.

There is considerable variation in the marking of students' work, and in the accuracy of assessment data used to set students targets and monitor their progress. In some subjects marking is outstanding in the quality of information it gives students about progress in relation to targets but this quality is not consistent across key stages or subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad and balanced and caters for most students' needs. The alternative curriculum and a range of vocational courses provide particularly well for students who are not suited to GCSE courses. The curriculum makes satisfactory provision for students' personal development; it includes an effective programme for personal, social and health education and personalised learning. Provision for the basic skills is inadequate because of weaknesses in literacy and ICT. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and of visits and visitors to the school that help to extend students' learning. Good sporting opportunities encourage students to develop a healthy lifestyle. The school's specialist status has a positive impact on the curriculum and has facilitated good links with the community and other schools. The school's designation as a specialist Arts and Technology College increases students' involvement in, and enjoyment of, art, drama and music.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The provision for care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Procedures for child protection are secure and supported by recent staff training. Required checks are carefully carried out to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. Students are well known to staff, and most say they feel safe in school.

They have some concerns about bullying, but trust adults to take them seriously. They value the help staff give them to help resolve their problems. The support for vulnerable students and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is sensitive and wide-ranging. Teachers, learning mentors, support assistants and others link closely with outside agencies to give these students individual, constructive support and guidance. Positive links with primary schools smooth the transfer of Year 7 students into the school. Older students receive helpful guidance about subject choices in Year 9, and their subsequent career and post-16 opportunities. Most students know their targets but are less clear about how to improve their work. Whilst those likely to do less well than they should are usually identified, the quality of academic guidance is not always sufficiently consistent and effective to bring them back on track.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Despite the strong commitment and hard work of the headteacher and senior leadership team, leadership and management are inadequate. Frequent monitoring of lessons and increased analysis of assessment and performance data have not yet led to improvements in students'

achievement so that they reach challenging targets. Small improvements in achievement at Key Stage 3 in 2007 are threatened by too much inadequate teaching, difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and a lack of leadership in English. The school's self-evaluation is inadequate. Despite frequent monitoring of lessons, teaching is not improving because the monitoring is not rigorous enough. Too many lesson observations fail to evaluate the impact of teaching on learning. Consequently, the quality of lessons is overestimated. Judgements on the quality of teaching and learning are over-generous. The role of middle managers has not been sufficiently developed for them to be fully involved in monitoring the work of their departments. Recently introduced policies and systems for improving teaching, tracking students' progress and managing behaviour have yet to be implemented consistently and become embedded in the work of the school.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are becoming better informed about the school, are aware of some of its difficulties and support the headteacher well.

Progress since the previous inspection is inadequate. There has been a downward trend in students' achievement over recent years. The school provides inadequate value for money.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	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?	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

29 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Millom School; A DCFS Technology and Art College, Cumbria, LA18 5AB

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We were particularly grateful to those of you who took time to speak with us and give us your honest opinion of the strengths of your school and also of what you felt needed to be improved.

These are the main findings in our inspection report:

- Your school has important strengths. Your personal development, the care, guidance and support you are given and the curriculum you study are all satisfactory.
- The sixth form is satisfactory.
- Standards are below average and you are not achieving well enough.
- Although some lessons are good, the overall quality of teaching is not good enough.

These are some of the things we have asked your school to do:

- Raise standards and achievement across the school, especially in English and science.
- Increase the pace and challenge of lessons.
- Make regular checks on how well the school is doing.
- Make sure your progress in all subjects is tracked carefully.

Overall your school is not providing an acceptable standard of education and so has been made subject to 'special measures' in order to help it to improve. This means it will receive extra support and inspectors will return each term to check its progress.

You can help your school to by continuing to attend regularly, behaving well in lessons and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector