

Parkside Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114296
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311554
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Deborah Wright

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	813
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Kingston
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Davies
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Hall Lane Estate Willington Crook County Durham DL15 0QF
Telephone number	01388 746396
Fax number	01388 746782

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Parkside School is a smaller than average comprehensive school. The school serves an area of higher than average deprivation and the number of students entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above the national average. Nearly all students come from White British backgrounds. In September 2006 the school was designated a specialist sports college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Parkside School provides its students with a satisfactory and improving education. The school has an ethos which values all students equally. The impact of this is evident in students' attitudes to their learning and their relationships in school. The school has many good features which have been developed through the vision and drive of the headteacher and the effective work of staff.

Standards are average and students make satisfactory progress which is improving over time. There is a strong determination amongst all staff to improve achievement and standards across the school and they are now rising, although the school accepts there is still some way to go. Current standards are rising in both key stages, although improvement at Key Stage 3, particularly in English, is slower than at Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development and well being are good. Their attendance has improved and behaviour is good. They say they feel safe in school and recognise that for each student a number of staff can be relied on to help and support them. They recognise the need for healthy lifestyles and many of them take part in after-school activities. Students make significant contributions to the community in a number of ways, including charitable work.

The quality of teaching and learning is good across both key stages and inspectors agreed with the school's self evaluation. Good quality teaching and learning is now beginning to impact positively on achievement. Planning is of a consistently high standard and meets the range of needs of the students. Lessons are taught with enthusiasm and praise is used well to encourage students in their learning.

The school offers a good curriculum which meets the needs of all learners and benefits from its specialist status in sport. Additional funding has enabled the school to upgrade its information and communication technology resources and this has had a positive impact on learning. Plans for developing the specialism are not yet included in whole school improvement planning.

Care, guidance and support are good and are beginning to contribute significantly to students' achievement. Students' progress is monitored well, particularly if they are in danger of underachieving or at risk of disaffection. Identification leads to focused intervention by teachers to boost the achievement of students who fall behind.

The leadership and management of the school are good. There are clear signs of rapid improvement in all aspects of the school's work. The headteacher and staff have a common sense of purpose and a clear picture of the school's performance. They are securely focused on raising standards and achievement. The senior team is robustly tackling underachievement at both key stages. They demonstrate good capacity to improve the school further. Governors are committed to the school but a better understanding of some aspects of the school's work is needed to enable them to support and challenge the school effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement further at both key stages, in particular at Key Stage 3 and in English.
- Include planning for sport within the school's improvement plan.
- Develop the role of governors to ensure they are able to support and challenge the school.

A small proportion of 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

The standards and achievement of students is satisfactory overall. Students joining the school at age 11 have reached standards similar to those found nationally. However, their literacy skills are often below average. For the last 3 years, standards in national tests in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 have been well below average. Current standards at Key Stage 3 are improving and Year 9 students are on track to meet their challenging targets and to reach standards in line with the national average.

The standards reached by students at Key Stage 4 have been well below average. In 2007 the number of students who gained the equivalent of at least 5 good grades at GCSE was below average, even though this was the highest results the school had achieved for 3 years. The proportion gaining 5 or more GCSEs including English and mathematics was lower still. These students entered the school with standards which were below the national average and with significantly lower levels of literacy than might be expected. Results were also affected by some students being on inappropriate courses. The school has analysed thoroughly reasons for underachievement and has taken effective action to address them. These actions are already impacting positively on the current Year 10 and 11 students. The school's own tracking of students' progress confirms an improving picture, with significant improvement in English and mathematics. Standards have been low, but they are now much better. The school has turned a corner. In lessons, inspectors saw students making progress which was at least satisfactory.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at least as well as others because of the good systems in place to support them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well being are good. Through participation in the range of sporting activities outside lessons, students respond well to encouragement to lead a healthy lifestyle. Students speak confidently about life at school, showing enjoyment and a positive response to the opportunities provided for them.

Students say they feel safe at school; the school has an award winning anti bullying policy. The behaviour of students is good both in lessons and around school, showing that students are responding positively to the school's clear and high expectations. Relationships are good and students get on well with each other and with staff. As a result the school is a well ordered and friendly community.

An important issue for the school has been to raise attendance. There are now very effective strategies in place, including contact with home on the first day of a student's absence and a significant range of rewards for good attendance. There has also been a significant decline in exclusions. As a result of these actions, attendance is now good.

Students make a positive contribution to their local community and beyond, for example through helping pupils in the primary schools with learning French and sport. They appreciate the opportunity to take responsibility by serving on the school council and are confident that their

views are taken seriously. Students are proud of their effectiveness in bringing about change, for example in the development of the new school logo.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Activities such as those undertaken in the community develop their confidence and self esteem, as well as helping them to understand their growing responsibilities as young citizens. Students benefit from comprehensive careers advice, work related learning and opportunities to improve their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. This is effective preparation for their future economic well being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and lead to students making good progress in their learning, although this is not yet reflected in results in national tests and examinations. Some examples of outstanding teaching were seen. Classroom practice is improving markedly in response to the emphasis the school is placing on this aspect of its work; for example well targeted training for teachers has led to good use of information and communication technology in lessons. There is an increasingly positive climate for learning because relationships between staff and students are good and teachers are well skilled at managing students and keeping them on task.

The school carries out careful monitoring of lessons. Good practice in teaching and learning is shared regularly within and between departments and teachers are eager to embrace new ideas and to share them with colleagues. Assessment information about students is used effectively to inform teachers' planning so that lessons are pitched at the right level to challenge students well. In the best lessons imaginative activities sustain students' interest and encourage them to think for themselves and work independently. Students have opportunities to evaluate their own and other students' work to establish a clear understanding of how to improve.

Systems to monitor students' progress are used effectively and students are set challenging targets for improvement, which they understand. Students' written work is regularly assessed and there are many good examples of informative feedback, helping students to improve.

Across the school, teaching assistants provide good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It has recently been comprehensively reviewed, providing the school with a clear view of the developments needed to improve provision. Senior leaders have acted swiftly to implement the changes required. These are already having a positive impact on students' progress. In particular, the curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of students who may be at risk of disaffection and vulnerable students. These groups of students are well supported by the special provision for them. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy has also been strengthened for Year 7 and Year 8 students.

The curriculum provides students with the skills required to meet local economic demands through an increasing emphasis on work-related learning and vocational education. Flexibility offered to students in Years 10 and 11 allows both academic and vocational choice and ensures

the changing needs, aspirations and ambitions of successive year groups are met. This is reflected in the current improvement in academic achievement.

A variety of educational trips enriches students' experience and widens their horizons. For example a large number of drama students visited Broadway in New York to see a professional production of the play they were studying for GCSE. The school provides a wide range of well attended extra-curricular activities. Sports are particularly popular, but students are also able to pursue their creative and artistic interests in music, art and other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school provides a positive place to learn and effective pastoral care and emotional support for all its students. The school works well with a range of external agencies to ensure that every student receives appropriate support when necessary.

Procedures for the transfer of students from primary schools are good and benefit from a dedicated member of staff whose role is to support this transition. As a result, new students settle very quickly into their new surroundings. The guidance programme ensures that students receive good support when making their choices in Year 9 and when deciding on their career paths at age 16.

Effective links are maintained with parents through regular reports and consultation days which ensure that they are fully informed of their children's educational progress. The majority of parents who expressed their opinion of the school were pleased with the care and support it provides.

The school analyses and tracks students' academic progress very effectively and those doing less well are given support to bring them back on track. Students are clear about their personal targets although the effect of this is not yet fully evident in examination and test results.

All required procedures for safeguarding, including child protection and health and safety measures, are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The very good leadership of the headteacher and her deputy is exemplified by a clear vision of improving achievement for all students. Together with the senior leadership team, they have made good progress in tackling those areas identified for improvement in the last inspection report. They have established a calm and purposeful school where students can learn without hindrance.

All staff who hold responsibility in the school share a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and, as a result, they know what they need to do to improve. A range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum have been implemented. Close monitoring of these is ensuring consistency of approach across the school. They have had an immediate impact on progress and on raising standards as evidenced in the gaining of early accreditation in examination subjects. Middle managers take increasing responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. Similarly, the majority of teachers take a more self critical view of the quality of learning in their lessons.

The school's sport specialism is effectively supporting improvement in the quality of provision and learning across other subjects. Further development is planned involving the community and other education partners. However, planning for this is not yet fully reflected in the school improvement plans.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors give generously of their time to support the school but some have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the school and its work and this prevents them from challenging the school effectively. The school currently provides satisfactory 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
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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
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

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?	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?	2
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 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	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	3
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

16 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Parkside Comprehensive School, Durham, DL15 0QF

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. Particular thanks go to those of you who met with us and all of you who shared your views with us. This helped us to reach our conclusions about the school.

Parkside School provides you with a satisfactory and improving education. Many aspects of what it provides are good; in particular, I would like to highlight the following areas.

- Personal development and well being are good. You made it clear to us that you feel safe in school. Your behaviour around and in school is good and we were very pleased to see the respect you show each other and to staff.
- Teaching and learning is good and staff are working hard to ensure that you all achieve the best you can.
- The curriculum is good and increasingly meets your needs. You told us about the wide range of activities available outside of lessons.
- Your school is well led and managed by the headteacher and senior leadership team.
- You receive good advice and support about your school work and about decisions you need to make at school.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make improvements in the following areas:

- raise standards and achievement across the school further still, and especially at Key Stage 3
- develop the role of governors so they are able to support the school more effectively
- ensure that planning for the specialist subject of sport is included in whole school development planning.

You can play your part by making sure you work hard and do your best.

Please accept our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Wright

Lead inspector