

Bedlingtonshire Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122360
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314277
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	856
6th form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John Bull
Headteacher	Mr Kieran McGrane
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Palace Road Bedlington Northumberland NE22 7DS
Telephone number	01670 822625
Fax number	01670 829378

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school which gained specialist status for technology in 1999. It serves a large area including the town of Bedlington and the surrounding rural area. Students come from three feeder middle schools, one of which is federated with the High School and shares the same site. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is average. Most students are of White British origin and few have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds but with significant pockets of deprivation. The school has Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Bedlingtonshire High School is a satisfactory and improving school. The strong leadership provided by the headteacher and his senior team, together with emerging strengths in the leadership of the key core subjects is beginning to have an impact right across the school. There is much still to do to tackle some weaknesses in the school's provision, and the school recognises, for example, that leadership and management are not yet of consistently good quality at all levels. However, the recent improvements seen across many areas of the school and the robustness of the action taken, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to deliver further sustainable improvement.

Students enter Year 9 with below average standards and make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. They reach below average standards at the end of Year 11 but given their starting points and capabilities this represents satisfactory achievement. The numbers of students gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A* to C is rising steadily and in the 2007 examinations Year 11 students achieved well in the core subjects of mathematics and English. However, the school recognises that there is too much variation between subjects in both the standards attained and in students' achievement.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most lessons are usually well planned, teaching is knowledgeable and classes are well managed; consequently students make satisfactory progress. Although most teaching is satisfactory and some teaching is good, too much inadequate teaching exists. However, the school is now monitoring lessons carefully, supporting and coaching weaker teachers and sharing good practice so teaching is improving. Students follow a balanced curriculum which is being improved by the addition of a wider range of vocational courses to better meet the needs of all students.

The care, guidance and support students' receive and their personal development are both satisfactory. Teachers know their students well and ensuring their health, safety, happiness and well-being are at the heart of the school's work. Students enjoy the limited opportunities they are given to take responsibility and contribute to the local community and they develop good basic skills which prepare them well for future life.

During the nine years that the school has been a specialist technology college, technology subjects have taken a prominent role in developing teaching and learning, providing training for new and existing teachers and developing links with local business and industry. Mathematics has become the highest performing subject in the school with achievement at GCSE level placing them in the top 20% nationally, whilst at the same time performance in science has been in line with similar schools. Following a successful application to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) the school is changing to a mathematics and computing specialism from September 2008. This is in line with local requirements and matches the school's strategic intent to become a centre for excellence in mathematics.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Students enter the sixth form with average standards and make satisfactory progress over two years to reach average standards when they leave. In A level examinations in 2007 results were average overall but there were marked variations between subjects. Students achieved best in physics, mathematics, biology and

English literature and least well in design technology, history, physical education and some vocational subjects. A new sixth form entry policy, an improved curriculum and good individual guidance are resulting in students now being better matched to the courses they study. Consequently, more students are completing their courses, pass rates are improving and standards are rising. Leaders and managers know the strengths and weakness of sixth form well. Improvements in all aspects of provision are already taking place and the sixth form now has good capacity to improve further.

Satisfactory arrangements for the leadership and management of the sixth form are ensuring a suitable combination of managers who know the students well and senior leaders who have an overview of students' academic progress and personal development. Improved systems for setting students' targets, analysing assessment data and monitoring their progress are leading to more consistent practice across departments.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Students are now being given more opportunities to learn independently which is increasing their enjoyment of lessons and equipping them better for their future study and careers. Relationships are good and students comment warmly on the good level of personal support they receive. Students also value the opportunities they are given to voice their opinions and take responsibility, although both they and the school recognise that these opportunities are currently too few.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement and reduce variations in performance between subjects.
- Eliminate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of good teaching.
- Develop the practice of subject and year leaders to ensure consistently good leadership and management at all levels.

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

Standards are below average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils reach below average standards in Year 6 tests with fewer pupils attaining the higher grades than is the case nationally and more having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. After two further years in middle schools students join the high school and make satisfactory progress to reach below average standards in tests at the end of Year 9. In 2007, students achieved best in mathematics where school targets were met but less well in English and science.

All students continue to make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. Although results in the 2007 GCSE examinations remain below average, and specialist school targets were not met, the numbers of students attaining 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades (including English and mathematics) is rising steadily each year. Detailed school data shows that this rising trend is continuing. Increased numbers of students are on track to meet their targets in all subjects this year and students were seen making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. There are considerable variations in the standards students reach and their levels of achievement across subjects. In the 2007, GCSE examinations students achieved best in music, art, mathematics and English language and least well in history and design technology. Students

with learning difficulties and /or disabilities achieve as well as their peers because they receive constructive individual help from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students' behaviour is satisfactory and they say that they enjoy school. They socialise well and most behave in a responsible manner around the school. More rigorous behaviour guidelines and procedures have been introduced and these are having a positive effect in reducing exclusions. Students report that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly and effectively. They feel safe in school. The school has introduced a variety of initiatives to reduce absence, but these have not yet had time to have a full impact and attendance remains below the national average.

Students understand the importance of healthy eating and the benefits of physical exercise. This is actively promoted through the curriculum and the school has achieved the Healthy Schools Award. Students' moral and social development is satisfactory, but their spiritual and cultural development is relatively limited. There are few opportunities for students to contribute to the school community. The school council no longer operates. However, contributions to the local community are increasing. For example, a group of Year 10 students were actively engaged in running a mini Olympics for a local first school. Students are prepared well for later life through an emphasis on the basic skills of numeracy and literacy, information and communication technology (ICT), and an effective programme of work related learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Lessons are usually planned well by teachers with secure knowledge of their subject so that students know what they are going to learn. In the best lessons teachers plan interesting and ambitious activities to motivate and challenge students so that they enjoy their learning and make good progress. These lessons are organised so that students have opportunities to work independently and take more responsibility for their learning.

In too many lessons the pace of learning is slower because teachers talk for too long and questioning does little to promote students' own ability to think or further their understanding. On the few occasions when teaching is inadequate, lessons are characterised by mundane activities that do not challenge students or capture their interest, sometimes leading to disruptive behaviour.

Whilst some teachers do give good feedback to students, there was little evidence that the school has yet achieved consistency in the frequency, quality and use of marking and assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. It is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has moved from offering students a choice of mainly GCSE and A level courses to a wider range of qualifications including more practical courses. The personal, social and health education programme is well planned and makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development. The provision for ICT has improved with separate lessons provided for all students and a new suite of additional commercial qualifications now available. There is a reasonable range of opportunities for students to enhance their studies through enrichment activities. An interesting example of this is the new wild life area created by students and now home to a migratory duck and her ducklings. There is satisfactory provision for music and sporting activities outside the school day together with a growing range of other activities such as cooking, fishing and residential visits. The important skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are developed well and students are given ample opportunity to develop skills which will prepare them for future life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support. Requirements for safeguarding and child protection are in place and regularly reviewed. Health and safety procedures are followed and risk assessments carried out where appropriate. The school has moved to a tutor system where students of similar age are grouped together which is leading to improvements in the tracking and monitoring of their progress. However, more consistency is required across departments to ensure that students are well informed about their progress through helpful marking and assessment. Students receive useful information, advice and guidance when they join the school and at the end of each key stage. The school is committed to inclusion and actively promotes equality of opportunity. The inclusion unit provides good support and guidance for those at risk and works well with outside agencies. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and their achievement is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory, as reflected in the smooth day-to-day running of the school, and in the satisfactory progress made by the students. However, the new headteacher has galvanized the school; there is now a clear sense of purpose and a clear focus on raising achievement. The senior leadership team have a refreshingly honest and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are fully aware of what the school needs to do to improve. The headteacher is a considerable strength, who, with an effective senior leadership team and supportive governing body, is implementing a challenging change agenda. Central to this has been the drive to improve middle leadership. Middle leaders are being made accountable for performance in their areas and are being

challenged to raise achievement through monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. This represents a sea change in the role of middle leadership at the school. In subjects such as English, mathematics and science, effective leadership is leading to improved standards and better teaching and learning. However, there is still much to do and currently, inconsistencies in the rigour and approach of the middle leaders' results in some wide variations in students' performance across subjects. The school's procedures for financial management are sound and the school provides satisfactory value for money. Given the school's track record of improvement and clear vision for the future it is well placed to improve further.

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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?	3	3
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?	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	3	
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	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?	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?	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	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	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

10 July 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Bedlingtonshire Community High School, Northumberland, NE22 7DS

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave me and my colleagues when we visited your school last week. We were particularly appreciative of the honest way you shared your views with us. We all admired the good work you had done in restoring the pond and were delighted to see the duck and her ducklings that had made a home there.

What we have said about your school in our report:

- yours is a satisfactory and improving school
- the leadership and management of your headteacher are good
- your achievement and personal development are both satisfactory
- the curriculum you study and the care, guidance and support you receive are satisfactory
- your behaviour is satisfactory but your attendance is below the national average.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- raise standards and achievement and reduce variations in performance between subjects
- increase the proportion of satisfactory and good teaching
- develop the work of subject and year leaders to ensure consistently good leadership and management at all levels.

You can help your school to improve further by attending regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector