

Northfield School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111731
Local Authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	325446
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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 (total)	1070
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Don Stringer
Headteacher	Mr David J Youldon
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2005
School address	Thames Road Billingham TS22 5EG
Telephone number	01642 557373
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Northfield School, Sports College and Training School is larger than the average sized comprehensive school. It serves an area of high social and economic deprivation. Students are predominantly of White British backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is average, as is that of students with a statement of special educational need. The school was granted Sports College status in 1999. It has the International School award, Sportsmark Gold, Artsmark Silver, the Healthy Schools Gold and Eco Schools Bronze awards. It was recognised as one of the most improved schools by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in January 2007 and awarded High Performing Specialist School status in March 2007. Partnership Development School status was awarded in 2007 and Training School status in 2008.

The college is subject to reorganisation proposals when, in September 2009, it will take students from a neighbouring school due for closure. There is special provision for students with visual impairments.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding college. Its commitment to equality of opportunity has resulted in an exceptionally broad range of GCSE attainment for every student which has been consistently well above national norms. Attainment at the higher GCSE grades is good and improving. Overall standards are well above average. Students make excellent progress. Equally impressive, is the outstanding personal development of students whose learning skills, personal qualities and conduct equip them extremely well for the future.

Parents are very appreciative of the opportunities provided to enrich their children's education. It is not only in sport that the college excels, but also in drama, dance and the arts generally. It makes excellent use of its links with schools abroad to broaden students' understanding of the diversity of other cultures and traditions. Sports status permeates the life of the college. The impressive sporting facilities are used to promote students' health and well-being and to foster team spirit and initiative. The college is providing an excellent focus for the local and wider community and contributing significantly to a sense of cohesion in the locality.

Teaching is outstanding because expectations are very high and students are expected to be independent in the way they learn. They do so in many ways especially in accepting responsibility for their behaviour which is excellent. They make excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT). They assess themselves and know how well they are doing. They work well in groups to help each other improve. The curriculum is excellent. It is carefully matched to students' needs and provides a careful balance of academic and vocational courses. Work-related learning and effective careers guidance prepare students very well for the next stage in their lives. The number not continuing with their education or undertaking training when they leave has diminished considerably and is now in single figures.

The care and support afforded to all students are excellent. This is most evident in the work done with the most vulnerable. Visually impaired students, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a statement of special educational need, and those who are looked after by the local authority are part and parcel of the vitality of college life and match or outdo their peers in their accomplishments.

The college has been exceptionally successful in developing the teaching skills of trainees and younger staff and the leadership potential of the more experienced. The result is that a great deal of outstanding teaching was seen and leadership and management at all levels are at least good and in many areas excellent. That of the headteacher is exemplary. He is clear about what he wants for every student and from every member of staff. His sensitivity in dealing with others means he gets what he wants.

Several parents voiced their concern about the quality of provision being maintained under the reorganisation proposals. The inspection found that the systems in place to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning and to develop in students a respect for each other and adults are robust and well established. On this basis, the college is very well placed to meet those concerns and has excellent capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant areas for improvement beyond those in the college's development plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is excellent. Students' academic attainment on entry to the college is broadly average. However, the proportion of high attaining students starting in Year 7 is lower than is normally seen and the language and communication skills of many students are less well developed than is expected. The progress students make in relation to their starting points and their levels of attainment by the end of Year 11 are outstanding.

The results attained by Year 9 students have been improving over the last three years. In 2007, they were average and the college's performance targets were met. Provisional results for 2008 show a significant rise in standards. The college has been particularly effective in identifying and addressing areas for improvement. This has resulted, for example, in a marked rise this year in the number of students reaching the higher Level 6 and above in English.

Students' overall attainment at the end of Year 11 is well above average and improving. Over the three years to 2007, virtually every student attained at least five or more GCSE grades A* to G, exceeding the national norm. In 2008 every student attained at this level. The proportion of students attaining five or more grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was average in 2007 and performance targets were met. That proportion increased in 2008, with a year group that was below average in attainment on entry to Year 7. The college's assessments and the quality of work now seen in lessons show that the rate of progress has improved even further. The current Year 11 students are well placed to maintain the college's exceptional five or more grades A* to G performance and exceed the expected norm for five or more A* to C grades.

The close match of work to students' individual needs enables those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make excellent progress. They achieve very well with examples of some of these students performing better than their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Exemplary behaviour and attitudes, together with students' respectful working relationships with each other and adults, have created a harmonious and purposeful learning community. Students report that they feel safe in the college and that bullying is uncommon and dealt with effectively on the rare occasions when it happens. In virtually all the lessons seen, students were engrossed in their work. They want the best and are articulate and persuasive in getting it. For example, students said they wanted electronic whiteboards in all classrooms because they enjoyed the challenge of interactive learning. The college promptly complied. Attendance is just above the national average and is good when compared to schools in similar circumstances. Students know how to keep fit and well. All students have at least two hours of physical education each week and most participate in a range of extra-curricular sporting activities. They choose to eat a balanced and healthy diet at lunchtime. The work of the college's student council and the many opportunities students have for taking responsibility, for example, as junior sports leaders, contribute to their growing maturity. They show sensitivity to the needs of others and have raised impressive sums of money for those less fortunate than themselves. They are exceptionally well prepared for the

next stage in their education because they leave the college with the qualifications, learning skills and personal qualities for future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Students' excellent progress is based upon outstanding teaching and learning. During the inspection, an exceptionally high proportion of outstanding lessons were seen. A lot was then demanded of students. They were challenged to think creatively and work independently and they were expected to assess their own progress and help each other to improve. Students' use of the 'virtual learning environment' in modern foreign languages, for example, showed their exceptional level of independent learning. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. Lesson planning is excellent and teachers structure learning activities at different levels of difficulty to closely meet the needs of all students. Teachers and support assistants monitor students' learning assiduously and are very effective in supporting individuals who struggle. Marking is regular and thorough but at times the comments lacked clarity on how to improve. Students effectively make use of basic skills across the curriculum and in their extra-curricular activities. They use ICT for research, they analyse and order data to present to the class and then review how successful they have been in putting it across. In their cultural and sporting activities they learn to work together and play to each other's strengths. The use of such skills is an excellent preparation for the challenges that lie ahead.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Provision is tailored to students' needs and it is evaluated and adapted regularly to maximise students' progress. A more selective use of texts for boys has led to a significant improvement in their writing. The imaginative use of ICT in the teaching of modern foreign languages has greatly increased the number of students studying languages in Years 10 and 11. Provision is broad and inclusive for Years 7 to 9, enabling visually impaired students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate fully in all activities. Excellent arrangements with a number of educational and training partners provide an extensive range of academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. Students of all ages have the opportunity to meet interesting visitors, particularly sports personalities, and take part in trips out of school. There are, for example, field trips in geography, history and religious education, theatre visits and competitions won for design and the use of ICT. Sports College status has enriched the curriculum and extended the opportunities for students to play an active part in a wide range of voluntary activities. The quality of that extra-curricular provision is excellent and the high participation rates indicate that the activities are making a very valuable contribution to students' personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support students receive are outstanding. Students say staff are friendly and approachable regarding work or personal problems. Exemplary care and respect for all students is at the heart of the college's work and accounts for their excellent progress. Students grow in confidence, enjoy their learning and experience success. This is particularly apparent

in the excellent academic and personal development of vulnerable students, those who are visually impaired, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational need. Excellent use is made of a range of outside agencies to support such students. Safeguarding, child protection, health and safety and risk assessment systems are in place. The college actively promotes inclusion and equality. Students at risk and vulnerable students are identified and well supported. Students know their current assessment levels and the targets they are working towards. Effective systems exist for monitoring their progress as they move through the college and they receive timely and appropriate guidance to help them make informed choices about the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. The headteacher's leadership is exceptional for the clarity of his vision for every student's development and his ability to secure the commitment of all staff to bringing it about. His expectations are very high. The result has been that students leave Year 11 extremely well prepared for the future. Self-assessment is accurate. Leadership and management at all levels are at least good and in many cases excellent. Forward planning priorities are appropriate for the challenge of integrating students and staff from the neighbouring school. The college is very well placed to succeed in this because of its expertise as a training school and the success it has had in developing the teaching and leadership potential of so many of its own staff. Governors know the college well and are taking an active leadership role in planning for the future merger. They ask the right questions as well as giving support and encouragement.

Specialist College status is excellently led and managed. Sporting facilities are outstanding and well used by the local community. As a result, the college's contribution to the community's interests and sense of cohesion is first class.

There have been significant improvements since the last inspection, particularly in the number of students attaining at the highest levels in tests and examinations and in improved standards in English, mathematics and science. The college's capacity to build on its considerable achievements is excellent.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

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

28 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Northfield School and Sports College, Stockton-on-Tees, TS22 5EG

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your college. Thank you also for the friendly welcome we received and your courtesy and honesty when speaking to us. Many of your parents sent in completed questionnaires which helped us to understand the quality of the education you are receiving.

We found that yours is an outstanding college because every student is obtaining a broad range of qualifications and this is wonderful preparation for the next stage in your education. Achievement is excellent and standards are well above average. Equally important, you have the ability to work well both independently and with others. The behaviour and attitudes to learning we saw were exemplary and you have the personal qualities to make the most of the opportunities which lie ahead. You have a keen sense of right, wrong and fair play, and are sensitive to the needs of those less fortunate than yourselves.

There are excellent relationships between yourselves and members of staff and you are cared for and supported very well. The range of sporting and cultural activities is outstanding and most of you take full advantage of these. You told us that they are enjoyable, give you a sense of achievement and do much for your general well-being.

Much of the teaching and learning we saw was outstanding. This was not only down to the expertise of the members of staff but we found that you are keen to learn and have confidence to take risks and learn from your mistakes. You also work well together, share ideas and help each other when difficulties arise. As a result, your progress is rapid.

Our best wishes to you all and every success to those who will be sitting examinations next summer.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead inspector