

High Tunstall Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111748
Local Authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	325449
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Maddison 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 (total)	1270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ken Shepherd
Headteacher	Mrs Mirjam Buhler-Willey
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
School address	Elwick Road West Park Hartlepool TS26 0LQ
Telephone number	01429 261446
Fax number	01429 222856

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

High Tunstall College of Science is a larger than average sized school situated on the outskirts of Hartlepool. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. Whereas the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, the proportion with statements of special educational needs is above average. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. There is a comparatively small number of looked after children and a small number of students for whom English is not their first language. The college has an additionally resourced provision for students with physical and medical difficulties. The college became a Specialist Science College in 2005, and has recently gained the Healthy Schools Award and the Eco Schools Bronze Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving college. It has some good features, most notably in the achievement of the students, in their personal development and well-being, and in the curriculum which is provided for them. Pastoral support is particularly well developed and the college rightly prides itself on the level of care and welfare it provides. As a result, the college is beginning to live up to its motto of creating 'a dynamic inclusive learning community acclaimed for its pursuit of excellence'.

Achievement is improving. However, there is scope for even higher achievement and for more students, and especially the most able, to attain the highest grades at GCSE. Students enter the college with average levels of attainment and make good progress by the time they leave at the end of Year 11. In 2007 the college achieved its best ever results at GCSE with 62% of students gaining five or more subjects at the higher grades. Provisional results for 2008 indicate that students' performance at GCSE was not as good. Exceptionally difficult staffing issues meant that the college was aware that results in English would be disappointing. Nevertheless, the college responded promptly and action continues to be taken to deal with the issues which have arisen from the analysis of results.

The personal development and well-being of the students are good, as is the care, guidance and support the students receive. The pastoral support for vulnerable students and for those with physical and medical learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. This reflects the college's ethos, which is valued by parents. Current national requirements for safeguarding students are met and arrangements for child protection are thorough. Students are well known to staff and say they feel valued as individuals, listened to and looked after. Students generally behave well. They are confident; they work well together and are effectively acquiring the skills they need for later life. Students enjoy coming to college as is shown by their attendance which is good. A varied programme of additional and extra-curricular activities, including sport, music, drama and residential visits, contributes valuably to students' achievement, enjoyment and personal development. The curriculum is also enhanced by enrichment days, many of which are related to the college's science specialism. All these opportunities are greatly valued by the students.

Students are doing better in their work not least because the curriculum has been adapted to meet more appropriately their needs, aptitudes and interests. The college has revised the curriculum at both key stages and focussed upon creating 'learning pathways' which provide students with the opportunities they need to achieve their potential. Specialist status is beginning to have a positive impact on attitudes and expectations across the college. Teaching is contributing to the improvement in achievement but it is not yet good overall. Best practice in teaching and learning is being shared across subjects. However, too many lessons are satisfactory because teachers' expectations are not high enough and the level of challenge for students, especially the most able, is too low. Although behaviour in lessons and attitudes to learning are generally good, students in many satisfactory lessons are happy to let the teachers do most of the work and some teachers are prepared to do it! Most students know their individual targets. However, the marking of students' work and written feedback are inconsistent across subject areas and do not always provide them with precise advice on how to improve. As a result, students only have superficial knowledge of how to bring about improvement in their learning and too few students are developing the ability to be effective independent learners.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior and middle leaders can point to how their work is helping to improve the college. However, the effectiveness of their actions is limited in part because senior leaders have yet to establish the cohesion required to enable them to raise standards further and realise the college's aspirations for the students. Although the proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was low, the vast majority who did complete them had concerns and expressed their disquiet at length. The college has been made aware of the issues raised and it appreciates the importance of engaging more effectively with parents and carers. Nevertheless, there was strong agreement from parents and carers that students enjoy college and are well cared for. Governance is good; governors are knowledgeable, are aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and meet regularly to execute their statutory duties offering both support and challenge. The last year has been a particularly turbulent time but, under the resilient leadership of the headteacher, the college has been determined to put the needs of the students first. In this it has had some success. Effective action has been taken to deal with the areas for improvement highlighted at the time of the last inspection, and the capacity for improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement for more able students through greater expectation and challenge in lessons.
- Improve the consistency and quality of feedback including marking so all students have a clear view of how they are doing and understand what they need to do to improve.
- Engage more effectively with parents and carers so that they are more involved in the life of the college.
- Improve leadership and management to ensure that senior leaders work together more effectively to raise standards and realise the college's aspirations for the students.

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: 2

The achievement of students is good. Results in 2007 in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 showed that overall standards are rising and that students are making good progress. However, provisional results for 2008 are mixed. Although there were some improvements at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE, the proportion of students who gained five or more subjects including English and mathematics at the higher grades at GCSE was much lower than it had been in the previous year. The college has analysed these results and is putting in place a series of timely measures to raise standards, particularly in English, and to address the wide variation in standards which exists between subjects. Nevertheless, students are doing better, not least because many have positive attitudes to their work. It is also because in recent years the curriculum has been revised so that it meets more appropriately students' needs and aptitudes. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the good support and guidance they receive from teachers and inclusion assistants. However, there is scope for even better achievement and for more students, especially the more able, to attain the highest grades at GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They are polite, friendly and confident young people who generally behave well in lessons and around college. Students enjoy coming to college as seen in their attendance, which is good and improving, and their willingness to be involved in the extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities which exist. Students appreciate the health-related advice they receive through the personal, social and health education programme and the course in philosophy and ethics. They show a good understanding of the need for healthy lifestyles, such as participating in regular physical activity, and a significant number of students cycle to college. Students make positive contributions to the life of the college and the community, for example, through their charity and fundraising activities and through local community initiatives. They willingly take responsibility by serving on the student council and by acting as prefects, mentors and buddies. They enjoy these opportunities which develop their self-confidence and self-esteem as well as helping them to understand their growing responsibilities as young citizens. A well planned work experience programme and a good range of vocational courses and work-related learning initiatives help students develop the skills and qualities required for adult working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory but has some good features. It is improving not least because of the use of a common approach and the sharing of good practice. Relationships are good and help to ensure that learning is at least satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers set clear objectives, which help students understand how to be successful learners, and encourage students to think and work independently. They plan interesting activities, use a wide range of resources and manage classes well. They also ensure that there is challenge for all students regardless of their ability. However, too many lessons are satisfactory rather than good. In these lessons the students are not sufficiently engaged because teachers' expectations of what students can do and achieve are sometimes too low. Assessment information is being used more effectively to help set targets for students but it is not yet used consistently by teachers to plan students' work. As a result, students, particularly the most able, are not sufficiently challenged and do not have the opportunity to realise their potential. Although students usually know their targets, few are clear about what they need to do to achieve them. This situation is made worse because the feedback students are given in their books which would help them better understand how to improve is at best imprecise and at worst conspicuous by its absence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and it is helping to improve achievement and the personal development of all students. Statutory requirements are met and progression routes are clear. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 provides a wide range of courses and experiences which effectively meets the needs, aptitudes and interests of the students and helps them prepare for their future beyond the college. There are a number of vocational courses both on site and in collaboration with other secondary schools and external providers, and a personalised support programme which

is provided for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, there are increasing opportunities for more able students to be entered early for some GCSE and AS level examinations. The college has also taken steps to develop the curriculum at Key Stage 3 with the introduction of 'learning pathways' which are aimed at meeting the needs of all learners as well as helping to raise standards and improve student progress. Designed to support their transition into secondary school and equip them with the skills to become successful learners, the 'Opening Minds' course for some Year 7 students exemplifies the development of a more personalised curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is good with outstanding features. Students say that they feel safe in college, that the few incidents of bullying which occur are promptly dealt with, and that they always have someone to turn to. Students' care, guidance and support are enhanced not only through curriculum opportunities which help them think about the world in which they live but also through effective partnerships with outside agencies. The pastoral support for vulnerable students and for those with physical and medical learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. As a result, the progress of these students is as good as the progress of other students. The provision for transition into Year 7 is good and close links with primary schools help to ease new students into the college environment. Good guidance on option choices helps students to make informed choices at the end of Year 9 and when deciding on their subsequent career and post-16 opportunities. Procedures for checking students' academic progress are improving. As a result, the college is able to identify more accurately students who are likely to underachieve and to implement a range of strategies to support improvement. However, these systems are not consistently embedded across the whole college.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features. The headteacher has a clear priority to improve the standards of education and care for all students. In this she is supported by leaders and managers at all levels, by governors and by the staff. Middle leaders have become empowered to fulfil their roles and they are becoming more effective in their work. They are more aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the areas for which they are responsible and they are focused on raising standards and the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. However, this work has yet to impact fully in the classroom and on improving achievement and standards in all subjects. Senior leaders are able to demonstrate how their actions are beginning to bring about improvements in attainment and progress. However, the effectiveness of their work is limited. This is because some senior leaders are relatively new in post and their roles are still evolving. It is also because together the senior leaders have yet to establish the cohesion required to enable them to achieve their objectives. The college runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Financial management is sound and ensures that staff and resource are deployed appropriately. As a result, the college offers 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?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

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

26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of High Tunstall Comprehensive School, Hartlepool, TS26 0LQ

On behalf of the inspection team, I would very much like to thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited the college. We greatly appreciated the time you spent talking to us and found your comments very helpful. We also read the questionnaires completed by your parents. Please thank them for sending in the questionnaires and for taking the time to write comments as well.

We came to the college to find out what was going well and what could be improved. We found that:

you attend a satisfactory and improving college

you enjoy coming to college, you have good attitudes to learning and you generally behave well in lessons and around the college

your achievement is good, as are your personal development, the pastoral care you receive and the curriculum

the lessons you attend are improving but too many are satisfactory and some of you are happy to sit back and let the teachers do the work

the progress you make in your work is improving, though some of you could make better progress and gain better results.

We have asked the headteacher, the staff and the governors to help all of you, but especially the most able students, to be more challenged in your lessons and achieve higher standards. We have also asked Mrs Buhler-Willey to make sure that:

your work is regularly and closely checked so that you all have a clear view of how you are doing and understand what you need to do to improve

your parents are better informed of what is happening so that they can become more closely involved in the life of the college

the senior leaders work together more effectively to raise standards and improve the college.

Your teachers are keen for you to succeed but they cannot achieve this alone. It is very much up to you as well to listen to their advice, aim high and always try your best.

We very much enjoyed visiting your college and I would like to thank you once again for being so friendly and helpful.

I wish you every success in the future.

Michael Maddison

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools