

Tanfield School, Specialist College of Science & Engineering

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114293
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	325985
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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)	619
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Len Broxson
Headteacher	Mr Graeme Lloyd
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Tanfield Lea Road Stanley County Durham DH9 8AY
Telephone number	01207 232881
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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

Tanfield is a smaller-than-average secondary school. Most students are from a White British heritage and there are very few students from minority ethnic groups. There are very few students at an early stage of learning English. The socio-economic circumstances of students in the school are broadly average. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, though the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The school hosts a learning resource base for students with moderate learning difficulties, all of whom are integrated with mainstream classes for their learning.

The school is a specialist science and engineering college. It has won numerous awards in recent years, including Healthy Schools, Investors in Children, and is a member of the United Nations Regional Centre for Excellence in Sustainability.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Tanfield is a good school, which is improving rapidly. It has some outstanding features and is held in high regard by parents and the local community. Standards have risen quickly since the last inspection and the school has transformed many aspects of its work under the ambitious and inspirational leadership of the headteacher. Despite high staff turnover caused by retirement and promotion, the school has maintained an unswerving focus on securing excellent improvement since then and has an excellent capacity for further improvement.

By Year 11, students reach above average standards and their achievement is good. Results in GCSE examinations in 2008 were the school's best ever and exceeded both the national average and the school's own challenging targets. Students of all abilities did well and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did exceptionally well, because an outstanding curriculum provides all with appropriate routes to success. In Key Stage 3, standards have been average in recent years. This has changed this year as the impact of improvements to teaching and the curriculum have taken effect. School data and inspection evidence indicate that standards here are now above average and students' achievement is good. Good and sometimes outstanding teaching supports students of all abilities to do well. Most teachers make good use of assessment information to plan lessons that are at the right pitch for all groups of learners. In these lessons, students develop good independence because they can work unaided and teachers trust them to work hard towards their targets. Where assessment is not used well, learning is only satisfactory and too often students rely on the teacher to set the pace of their learning. Teachers' marking generally gives clear direction for how to improve, though this is not yet consistent enough in all classes.

Students' good personal development is seen in their good behaviour and enthusiasm for learning. Students show a good understanding of the needs of others and willingly accept responsibility, for example, when they organise fundraising events to help others. By the time they leave, they are extremely well-prepared for the future. Outstanding care, guidance and support begin with the excellent relationships between staff and students. Students are convinced that there is always someone there to help them and have recognised how the help and support available is adapted to meet an individual's needs. One student expressed how well the school had helped in overcoming difficulties in learning after joining the school last year and claimed 'I have been helped to do well and succeed. Help for people who need it is excellent.' Students' progress is tracked well. Prompt and effective interventions are put in place wherever more support or challenge are needed.

Leadership, management and governance are good. The senior leadership team gives a very good lead to the work of the school. They and middle managers have a sharp and accurate picture of where improvements are needed. Governors are very supportive and make positive and productive links with the community, but they are not yet sufficiently involved in the formal monitoring of all aspects of the school's work. Governors and staff support wholeheartedly the headteacher's vision for a school where staff and students work together to reach the highest standards in all aspects of its work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the effective use of assessment information for lesson planning so that learning is well-pitched in all lessons.

- Monitor the quality of marking to ensure that students are provided with good direction for improvement in all subjects and classes.
- Increase the governors' formal involvement in monitoring and evaluating the school's work, so they are more able to hold the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good and standards are above average. Students start in Year 7 with broadly-average standards. In the current year, school data and inspection evidence indicate that students in Year 9 are on course to exceed the school's targets and national averages. Improvement to standards has been rapid at Key Stage 4, where GCSE results have improved year-on-year. The 2008 examination results placed the school above the national average for the percentage of students achieving five or more passes at A* to C and A* to G grades. Students' progress was in the top 6% of all schools and the school exceeded its challenging targets, except in mathematics. Results including English and mathematics were closer to average, because of a dip in performance in mathematics. Achievement in mathematics has fluctuated from year-to-year. Students in Year 11 are on course to exceed once again the school's most challenging targets and improve on last year's overall performance in GCSE and other examinations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. The school has met or exceeded its specialist school targets, doing especially well in science and technology.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Students behave well in lessons and move around school in a safe and calm way to create a harmonious environment. They say they feel safe in school and know where to turn for help. The number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped significantly since the last inspection. Students enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning. They work hard and are keen to do well. Attendance has improved well since the last inspection and is now above average. Many students take part in sporting activities and take advantage of the range of healthy food options at lunchtime, demonstrating a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Students are good fundraisers, and from the time they join the school take on responsibility for supporting different charities. They also recognise the needs of others farther afield and make productive and supportive links with schools in Africa. The 'student voice' gives students the opportunity to make a good contribution to the school community, through identifying and promoting improvements. Students develop good citizenship skills and actively support work in the community, for example, through their work with local primary schools on the allotment project and 'Connecting Classrooms' in science and engineering projects. By the time they leave, students are extremely well-prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There is a significant proportion of outstanding teaching in some departments, which is reflected in their high performance in national tests and

examinations. Teachers make regular and accurate assessments of students' learning. Where this information is used effectively to plan the next stages in learning, tasks are well-pitched to give students the right level of challenge and guarantee good progress. Time is used very well and learning moves at a rapid pace. Where assessment is not used effectively enough, the pace of learning is slower and students' enthusiasm reduced. In some lessons, there is too much control of the pace of learning by teachers. In these lessons, learning slows because students are not given enough independence and responsibility and they spend too much time listening.

Much of the very best learning occurs when students are presented with activities from which they can learn independently. Many teachers place good emphasis on developing team skills so that students become good listeners, support each other well and recognise that they can learn much from each other. In some lessons, information and communication technology (ICT) is used exceptionally well to challenge and clarify students' understanding, learning moves at a 'cracking pace' so that students begin to set the challenges themselves. While teachers routinely mark students' work, there is too much inconsistency in the quality and effectiveness of the guidance given to improve. Over time, this leads to a reduction in the rate of progress for some students, who with the good guidance they receive in some subjects, do better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is driven by an innovative approach to provide the best routes for all students. There have been excellent improvements since the last inspection, including the introduction of two languages for all Year 7 students and reorganising teaching groups so that students' needs are met very well, for example, with fast-track groups in English and mathematics. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum embraces an outstanding range of pathways for students who are able to select from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. These include an extensive choice of applied learning courses, such as hospitality and catering and construction, delivered in conjunction with local colleges. Offsite provision is monitored robustly to ensure it is of high quality and meets students' needs. Further enrichment is offered through after-school provision of additional subjects that students wish to study, for example, music and additional languages, including Latin. This personalised approach is enhanced by a clear commitment to developing work-based learning skills through links with nearby industry and businesses, including the Derwentside Engineering Forum. The school's specialisms have supported many curriculum developments including the development of the modern foreign languages provision both at Key Stage 3 and in local primary schools.

The curriculum is enhanced further by the very wide range of visits and the well-attended activities that take place at lunchtimes and after the school day, such as an extensive range of popular and successful sporting clubs, science and engineering clubs as well as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and make a significant contribution to the school's outstanding inclusion practices. Staff provide prompt and caring support to help all students succeed and ensure they have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. All procedures for safeguarding and child protection are in place and meet requirements. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those who are part of the learning resource base, is excellent. Their individual needs are assessed exceptionally

well and this information is shared with staff to ensure that students receive excellent support in lessons. Dedicated teaching assistants are well-trained to support both the academic and personal development of these students, so that they make excellent progress and play a full part in the life of the school. Students with personal problems or social and emotional difficulties are supported extremely well by specialist teams inside the school and through excellent links with external agencies. The school's carefully-tailored provision has led to a significant reduction in the number of exclusions since the last inspection and to a significant reduction in the proportion of persistent absentees.

Students are well-informed about their progress within lessons and through regular assessments of their learning. They are taught to assess their own learning and that of their peers and this helps them take responsibility for their progress. Transition arrangements for students joining and leaving the school are extremely good because the school has excellent links with feeder primary schools and local colleges.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's ambitious vision for the school is shared by all senior and most middle leaders. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows itself exceptionally-well. This leads to outstanding improvement planning, with challenging, yet realistic targets, which are being used effectively to improve the school at a rapid pace. New appointments to leadership roles at senior and middle level are strengthening the effectiveness of management, which is beginning to develop a common sense-of-purpose amongst the staff. There is a clear focus on raising students' performance by improving teaching and learning across the school. Procedures for monitoring the work of the school within subject departments are firmly in place. Middle leaders value the opportunities to take responsibility and be accountable for wider aspects of the school's work. However, their role in assuring good-quality teaching and effective marking of students' work is inconsistent between subject departments. Equality of opportunity is promoted extremely well and the school is very effective in eliminating discrimination. Governance is good and provides effective support and increasing challenge to the leadership team, though governors are not yet sufficiently involved in the formal evaluation of the school. The school makes a good contribution to promoting community cohesion. It values diversity and welcomes all students. Good attention is given to developing a sense of belonging to the school and the wider community, extending as far as links with Africa. The school engages effectively with the local community and parents appreciate its work in ensuring that students with different learning needs and abilities have equal access to all of the school's provision.

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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?	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	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	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	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	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?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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**

8 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Tanfield School, Specialist College of Science & Engineering, Durham, DH9 8AY

It was a pleasure to inspect your school recently and I thank you for your help, for the warm welcome you gave to me and the inspection team. Yours is a good school, which is improving rapidly in all areas. This is because it is led and managed well. Some things about it are outstanding, such as the curriculum, which gives you all so many interesting and varied opportunities for your learning. The care, guidance and support that the school provides are outstanding too. Staff know you very well and they are determined to help each one of you to succeed, no matter what. The team could see that the school has developed some excellent ways of looking after your different needs since the last inspection. It was good to hear from you that behaviour has improved; so too has attendance.

Standards in the school have improved each year since the last inspection, so that now, those of you in Year 11 reach above average standards and all are achieving well. This is because you are well taught and your teachers have high expectations of what you can do. Some of you told us that, in the best lessons, you work at a fast pace and really enjoy the challenges. The inspectors saw some of these lessons, which were outstanding, and agree that students are very enthusiastic when learning like this. I have asked the school to make sure that all teachers use information from their assessment of your learning to provide more lessons of this quality. I have asked that the good-quality marking seen in many books is extended across all classes, so that you all know what to do to improve. I have also suggested that governors are more involved in evaluating how well the school is doing.

The inspectors were delighted to see how well-behaved and well-mannered you are in classrooms and around the school. They could see that you have excellent attitudes to learning and work hard in lessons. Your relationships with each other and with staff are excellent. You know how to stay healthy and look after your personal safety and are preparing to be good citizens through your generous fundraising activities and links with students from other cultures and backgrounds. Your good all-round personal development and good standards prepare you extremely well for the future. The inspectors loved the school Rock Band and think you all look 'cool' and business-like in your smart uniforms. Well done!

The inspection team wish all at Tanfield School the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector