

Woodham Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114304
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	325987
Inspection dates	1–2 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Georgiana Sale

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	972
Sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Christine Robinson
Headteacher	Mr Steve Harness
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2006
School address	Washington Crescent Newton Aycliffe County Durham DL5 4AX
Telephone number	01325 300328
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors

Description of the school

Woodham Community Technology College is an average sized college for students aged 11–18 situated in Newton Aycliffe. The sixth form at present has 22 students in Year 13 only while the college re-shapes the sixth form provision. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and there are very few students whose first language is not English. The proportion of students eligible for free college meals is average as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Woodham is an improving college that provides its students with a satisfactory education. Leaders have satisfactorily addressed the issues from the last inspection. Since the last inspection there have been positive changes to middle management and a second deputy headteacher has been appointed which has strengthened the college's capacity to hold subject leaders directly to account for the performance of their departments and for tackling areas requiring improvement. Well-focused professional development has resulted in all teaching now being satisfactory or good. Evidence of a committed senior team, some key appointments in middle leadership roles and effective impact shown within this year on achievement at Key Stage 4 demonstrate a satisfactory and growing capacity to improve.

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall both in the main school and in the sixth form. They enter with broadly average standards and make satisfactory progress during their time in the college to reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 11. Over the last two years, progress at both Key Stages has been hampered by staffing difficulties in key areas. This has had an adverse effect on students' performance, for example, in technology and information and communication technology (ICT). The headteacher has worked hard to address these issues with good support from the local authority. The college's tracking system now shows that students in Key Stage 4 are making greater progress than previously and are on course to meet challenging targets. Some Year 11 students have already secured an A* to C grade in English following early entry to GCSE examinations.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In the most successful lessons students have positive attitudes to learning and teachers have high expectations and motivate students through a variety of interesting activities. However, opportunities are often missed to challenge students and provide them with stimulating tasks that enable them to become independent, inquisitive learners. This means that not all students achieve their full potential.

The good curriculum has been adapted well to meet students' needs. A combined studies course is available to students in Key Stage 3 enabling them to make a smooth transition from primary school. A broad range of technology and vocational courses, for example engineering, are available at Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory as are the care, guidance and support they receive. Most students attend school regularly and most students behave well. Expectations of behaviour across the college have been raised by a new behaviour management system and as a result behaviour is improving. However, a few students misbehave and display negative attitudes which disrupt other students and prevent them from learning. This was reflected in the views of the students interviewed and concerns raised by a small number of parents.

The headteacher and senior staff are accurate in their self-evaluation. They know where the strengths and weaknesses are in the college and what needs to be done to improve. Governors support and challenge the college and there is a common sense of purpose among the staff towards tackling any potential underachievement. College leaders work very well in partnership with a wide range of other agencies both to give support and care to the students and to provide courses that are suited to the students' needs and interests.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education and is competently led and managed. A decision was taken not to start a Year 12 group in September 2008 to enable a new partnership arrangement to be made. Y12 courses will be offered in the future through collaborative arrangements. The capacity to improve is satisfactory though strengthening as a result of the college's arrangements for future 16+ provision.

Standards on entry to the sixth form are average and students make satisfactory progress to achieve broadly average standards by the end of Year 13. School leaders have taken decisive action to tackle issues of underachievement seen over the past three years, arising out of a narrow range of courses that were not well-matched to students' needs and abilities. They have forged innovative partnerships with other local education and training establishments to offer a much broader range of courses which will be available this year.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Care and support are good; students are given clear guidance so that they take appropriate courses linked to their capabilities and are given good advice to improve the quality of their work. The sixth form development programme is effective and allows the students to become confident and mature young adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more consistently positive behaviour and attitudes to learning so that all students can make the progress of which they are capable.
- Increase the level of teacher expectation in lessons to give all students more opportunity to become independent, inquisitive learners who are engaged in stimulating tasks.

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

Students enter the college with broadly average standards. They make satisfactory progress and by the time they reach Year 11 standards are broadly in line with national average, as shown by the proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes. The proportion achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics has also been broadly average but slipped in 2008 to below the national average. Senior leaders have developed more effective quality assurance procedures and a range of other strategies to make sure that this does not happen again. There is strong evidence to confirm the positive impact of steps taken to raise standards both in the college's own assessment information and from the results of external examinations already taken by Year 11 students in English and mathematics in 2009.

The college did not reach its targets in its specialist subject of technology due to staffing problems but these are now resolved. Current assessment information indicates that students are closer to meeting their targets this year. There is a steady trend of improvement in GCSE mathematics and in 2008 GCSE science results were above national averages. There has been particular success with the three courses in single sciences where all students who took the course gained an A* to C grade. Over half of the students take a foreign language at GCSE level and achieve standards above the national average.

Over the last two years less effective teaching at Key Stage 3 has resulted in uneven rates of progress between subjects including English, mathematics and science. Current assessment information shows that as a result of better teaching and learning and effectively targeted strategies to tackle underachievement, the rate of progress is improving in Key Stage 3 and is now satisfactory in all areas. The support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective and helps them achieve in line with their fellow students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students know how to keep healthy, they enjoy the healthy meals at college and a large proportion of them take part in the out-of-college activities. Students' attendance is satisfactory and the importance of good attendance is promoted by the college. Students generally get on well with each other and show consideration for others, with some acting as playground buddies to help younger pupils. Students are generally positive about school and comment on the impact of recent developments to help them in their learning, especially the 'Rising Stars' target setting system. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. It is supported by the increasing use of a social learning programme in the lower school and the varied specialist curriculum days that help students understand the diversity of the modern world. Timely careers advice, together with a growing range of vocational courses and enterprise activities provide a useful foundation in preparing students for their adult life, although some key skills in literacy and numeracy remain underdeveloped for a minority.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and sometimes good, but there are too many inconsistencies in practice between teachers. In most lessons, good working relationships between students and teachers promote positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations of students and provide sufficient challenge to move them on to their next stage of learning. Such lessons have a range of interesting and briskly-paced tasks that generate excitement and enthusiasm amongst students. Students concentrate well and work effectively independently or in groups. High quality, regular, spoken and written feedback to the students gives clear guidance on what they can do to improve and progress at a faster pace.

Where teaching and learning are satisfactory rather than good there is less variety of tasks, too much teacher talk and undemanding work. In such lessons the pace of work slows and work is not matched to the abilities of the students. Guidance from teachers about what to do to improve and information about the ability of students is not consistently used so that work is insufficiently matched to students needs and students are not clear about how to improve their grade. In a small number of lessons the misbehaviour of a small minority of students disrupted the learning of other pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good and increasingly diverse curriculum that meets the needs and interests of students. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is organised in a way that it supports less able students in nurture groups as they make the transition to secondary school and gives more able students opportunities to gain early qualifications. Many students take a modern foreign language at Key Stage 4 and the most able students are able to study three separate sciences. There is a growing range of relevant vocational courses in Key Stage 4 often linked to programmes such as Young Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities over two years.

The college has introduced a course to develop the social and emotional aspects of learning for younger pupils which is resulting in more positive attitudes to learning and respect for each other. Leaders recognise the need to extend this type of course to Key Stage 4 pupils as well. Extra-curricular provision is good and students said that they really value the opportunities to take part in activities like American football, 'Food for thought' and a range of artistic opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding students are in place. Procedures for monitoring attendance, including early contact to parents if a student is absent, are thorough. The vast majority of students feel safe and all those interviewed said that they always have an adult they can go to if they have a problem of any sort in college. Tutors and pastoral staff provide a good level of care for their students and the college makes good use of external partners to support students both within and beyond the school environment. Care and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and they receive effective in class support.

Assessment is used increasingly effectively in the college and students are increasingly involved in checking their own progress. The college has recognised that the academic guidance given to some students to help them improve standards is inconsistent and the good practice seen in some departments and some lessons is not followed across the school. Middle managers are giving priority to these issues to attain a greater consistency. The quality and quantity of marking of students' work is variable. Whilst there is good practice, sometimes advice is not given frequently enough or does not make clear exactly what the student needs to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has an inclusive vision for the school and for the local community and provides strong leadership. He has worked hard and imaginatively to secure better provision for students in the school working with a wide range of agencies and partners, for example, local training providers. The college is managing its budget effectively and provides satisfactory value for money.

The headteacher and senior team have a clear understanding of the priorities that will move the school forward and have put in place training to encourage key areas develop. Middle

leadership has been strengthened by recent appointments and managers have responded well to new challenges and are committed to raising standards. The detailed plans, linked to accurately identified areas for improvement, which are closely monitored and evaluated throughout the year, have resulted in effective change. Steps have been taken to improve the quality and accuracy of information about students' progress. Intervention is quickly taken when a student falls behind. Although it is too early to see the full impact of these measures, there is already some evidence seen in examination passes in core subjects in Year 11. Inconsistencies remain in the performance of some departments and in the quality of teaching and learning but these are being tackled by both middle and senior managers.

The college's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. The college promotes local community cohesion effectively and students have opportunities to increase their understanding and knowledge of global issues. However, the college has recognised that it needs to do more to encourage the students to understand and celebrate the diverse communities in the United Kingdom.

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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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	3	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	3	
The extent to which 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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	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	

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

2 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Woodham Community Technology School, Durham,
DL54AX

As you are aware, three colleagues and I recently spent two days inspecting your school and I am writing to let you know the judgements we have made.

The inspection found that yours is a satisfactory and improving school. You are set challenging targets and exam results at the end of Key Stage 4 are rising. Your progress has been satisfactory and this is also improving. This year, nearly all students left with five GCSE passes and Year 11 students achieved above national averages in subjects such as modern languages, art, music and science.

We thought that the range of courses that you choose from in Year 10 is good and helps all students achieve success in examinations. You told us how much you enjoy the range of sporting and other activities. Your teachers and other staff give you good support and you told us that you always feel there is someone you can talk to about any problem. Most of you behave well in classes and around school. However, you did tell us that there are some students who do not behave well and are stopping you from learning.

Mr Harness and all the staff work really hard to make the school a better place to be and have a good understanding of where further improvements can be made. To help with this we have asked them to:

- develop more consistently positive behaviour and attitudes to learning so that all students can make the progress that they are capable of
- increase the level of teacher expectation in lessons to give all students more opportunity to become independent, inquisitive learners who are engaged in stimulating tasks.

You need to make sure that you do not let anyone's poor behaviour stop your learning and that you go into classes ready to learn. Thank you again for helping us with the inspection of your school. We enjoyed spending the two days with you and wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Georgiana Sale AI

Lead inspector