

Ponteland Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122358
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327708
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake 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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1135
Sixth form	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Brown
Headteacher	Mr Stephen J Prandle
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2006
School address	Callerton Lane Ponteland Newcastle Tyne and Wear NE20 9EY
Telephone number	01661 824711
Fax number	01661 821831

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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

Ponteland is a Year 9 to Year 13 high school, with specialist language status. It is located in a semi-rural part of south Northumberland and is larger than the average sized secondary school, with a high number of students in the sixth form. Almost one-third of students come from outside the immediate catchment area. The percentages of students eligible for free school meals, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special education needs are below average. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage, with small numbers from a number of other ethnic groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ponteland is a good and improving school that is responding very well to the changing needs of its student population. A number of areas are outstanding, particularly provision in the sixth form. Ponteland is a very popular school, with around one-third of students coming from outside the immediate catchment area. Standards are above average throughout the main school, with students' achievement good. In the sixth form, standards are well above average, with achievement outstanding. Results have generally been improving since the previous inspection, due in part to the increasing range of curricular courses. However, over the past two years fewer students have gained five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. This is due, primarily, to boys' attainment in mathematics. Although recent school actions are now resulting in more Year 11 students on course to reach their targets in English and mathematics, boys' performance in mathematics is not closing the gap sufficiently quickly with that of the girls. Standards in subject areas relating to the school's specialism are above average overall, although standards in Spanish and German are significantly higher than those in French. Students with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress relative to their capabilities.

The school's good quality care, guidance and support are making a positive contribution to the students' improving personal development and well-being; these areas are outstanding in the sixth form. Students enjoy school, showing good behaviour and outstanding attendance. Students feel safe because they are confident that there is always someone with whom they can talk; this also includes some very good quality peer mentoring and support from sixth form students. The student voice is very strong in the school and views that are expressed are responded to positively. Good quality partnership work with local employers supports all students in preparing for life after school.

The quality of teaching and learning is good in both the main school and sixth form; some is outstanding. Teachers show very good subject knowledge, which contributes to the good progress made by students. Lessons of this quality help to maintain challenge and pace in students' learning and also encourage positive attitudes and behaviour. However, where students are too passive, mainly because of prolonged teacher talk, this hinders their ability to question and test out their knowledge and understanding. Some, but not all teacher marking and feedback enable the students to know exactly what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. The support received by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent, and contributes very positively to their outstanding progress.

The quality of the curriculum and other activities is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The school's emphasis on developing the key skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, together with its specialist language status, greatly enhances the curriculum. There is good staff awareness of curricular responsibilities, including some recent work in mathematics that has resulted in changes to the type of examinations offered at Key Stage 4. However, a whole-school approach to assessing the contribution of the curriculum to improving the progress and standards of different groups of students is currently underdeveloped. Local and international language links, together with a very good programme of extra-curricular and other activities helps to enrich and extend the range of learning opportunities for all students.

Leadership and management are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The headteacher provides clear direction for school improvement and is well supported by members of the senior leadership team. Although development planning enables senior leaders to gain an overview of the school's strengths and areas for further development, there is too great a variation in the collective quality and robustness of evidence to support the school's self-evaluation of its current provision. Well-defined link management roles and responsibilities ensure that a trusting and effective set of professional relationships exist across the school. Opportunities for communication between the school and parents have increased over the past three years, including the introduction of a parents' forum aimed at increasing the dialogue between the school and home. However, despite these developments, one-fifth of parents responding in the inspection questionnaire said they would welcome even better communication, especially from senior staff at the school. Governors are effectively fulfilling their role to support the school. The school has good capacity for further improvements and achieves good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This very popular sixth form is outstandingly successful. Students attain well above average standards and make excellent progress. In 2008, the sixth form had its best ever results, with a very high proportion of students gaining A to E grades, of which half achieved A and B grades at A level. All pupils achieved an A to E grade in vocational A levels. Overall, achievement is outstanding. The transition of students into the sixth form is very successful for both those that move from the main school, and also for the increasing number who come from other local secondary schools. Retention rates are high and a significant number move on to higher education. Academic guidance is excellent, with challenging targets and focused and effective support for all students, including those who have fallen behind with their work. There are high expectations for both academic success and personal development. There is an excellent range of curricular subjects on offer, including vocational and diploma courses. The school's language status makes a significant impact on the language provision in the sixth form. There is also an extensive extra-curricular programme and a number of other activities that help to promote students' voices; for example, the charity committee, presidential team, peer mentoring scheme and buddy system with younger students who need extra help in mathematics and reading. The students relish the opportunity to show initiative and, as a result, are having an increasingly influential impact on changes within the school. These many opportunities contribute significantly to the very high levels of enjoyment experienced by the students in the sixth form. The quality of teaching is good, which balances very well with the highly motivated and very well behaved students. Lessons are well planned and structured, but the tendency for some teachers to over direct students' learning reduces the opportunities for discussion and debate. Students appreciate the time allocated for personal research and would welcome even more opportunities to work independently; the school is looking at ways to develop these further. Leadership and management are very effective, and the rigorous systems of assessment, monitoring and target setting have underpinned the improvements in standards since the previous inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise boys' attainment in mathematics as an aid to improving the overall percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics.

- Develop a clearer whole-school approach to assessing the effects of the curriculum on the standards and progress of different groups of students.
- Develop further the communication between senior managers and leaders and parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In the main school, standards are above average and students' achievement is good. In the sixth form, standards are well above average, with achievement outstanding. The students start at the school in Year 9 with standards that are above average, which they maintain through to the end-of-year national tests. Unvalidated school-generated data indicate that results at the end of Key Stage 3 are improving at a faster rate than those seen nationally, particularly because of a greater proportion of students attaining higher levels in the three core subjects. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results have also improved year-on-year since the previous inspection, with an increasingly positive gap being achieved between the school's results and those seen nationally. The greater range of courses on offer to students in this Key Stage has been instrumental in this improvement. However, in 2008 fewer students than in previous years gained five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. As a result, the school did not meet its target for this performance measure. One reason for this decline is the boys' performance in mathematics, which has lagged behind that of the girls. The school has taken prompt action this year to bring about improvement and current internal monitoring indicates that more Year 11 students are on course to reach their target in English and mathematics in this year's examinations. However, boys' performance in mathematics is not closing the gap sufficiently quickly with that of the girls. Standards in subject areas related to the school's specialism are above average overall, although standards in Spanish and German are significantly higher than those in French. The attainment of students with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above their comparative average, and is an indication of the outstanding progress that they make relative to their capabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good and improving in the main school; these aspects are outstanding in the sixth form. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted by a regular 'thought for the week', and the successfully delivered personal development and social and emotional programme. The students enjoy school, which is evidenced through surveys, outstanding attendance and good behaviour. Fixed and permanent exclusions are very low. The school actively promotes students' physical well-being through its choice of healthy food options at lunchtime and the wide range of sport and other activities that are offered both in and out of school. The response of students has been good in both these areas. Students say they feel safe in school because they understand and happily comply with the school's clear code of conduct, and also that they know there is always someone with whom they can talk if the need arises. The student voice is very strong in the school and views that are expressed are responded to positively; for example, the students have helped to bring about changes in uniform, recycling bins, and in areas of learning such as reviewing the effectiveness of different teaching arrangements. Students are encouraged to participate in local and global communities, both of which enable them to become active citizens. Some older students volunteer to support their younger peers with both curriculum and personal problems. This benefits both age groups; the younger students find this an approachable way of getting

help and the older students feel it helps them to develop skills useful in adult life. The students find their careers education and work experience relevant to their future economic well-being, including their personal development and employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good in both the main school and sixth form; some is outstanding. In almost all lessons, teachers plan and provide a broad range of activities to meet the varying learning needs of the students. Teachers show very good subject knowledge and, when linked with challenging teaching techniques which include effective questioning, ensure that the students make good progress. Lessons of this quality also help to create a good quality learning environment, which maintains pace and challenge and the encouragement of positive attitudes and behaviour from the students. However, where students are too passive, mainly because of prolonged teacher talk, this hinders their ability to question and test out their knowledge and understanding. There is very good use of information and communication technology to enhance the quality of learning for the students. Some, but not all teacher marking and feedback enable the students to know exactly what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. The best quality marking is seen in examination courses, where teachers use course guidelines and mark schemes to provide effective feedback as an aid to the students knowing how good their work is and how well they are progressing towards their identified grade. The support received by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent and contributes very positively to their outstanding progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum and other activities is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The school's specialist language status greatly enhances the curriculum, both in the specialist areas and across the school more broadly. The language department is playing a leading role in the development of the curriculum, both within the school and in the planning of shared projects, staff training and specialist teacher support in partner feeder schools. The school has responded positively to the previous inspection report and local and national initiatives, and has developed the breadth of its curricular provision to include a greater range of vocationally orientated courses in both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The school has carefully developed staff awareness of curricular responsibilities through a number of successful school-based initiatives. However, a whole-school approach to assessing the contribution of the curriculum to improving the progress and standards of different groups of students is currently underdeveloped. Good links have been established with a number of local partners, particularly in the areas of enterprise education and work related learning. These links are helping to broaden opportunities for the students to experience the world of work, which is contributing positively to their future economic well-being. The school has clear and effective priorities for developing the key skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology as an aid to supporting students' learning across the curriculum. Local and international language links, together with a very good programme of extra-curricular and other activities, help to enrich and extend the range of learning opportunities for all students. Both students and parents appreciate the broad range of courses on offer, which adds significantly to the quality of the curriculum and the students' enjoyment of attending school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Correct risk assessments, including health and safety procedures, are in place and comply with statutory requirements. Students are helped to be aware of safety issues at school, including their use of the internet. The school has restructured its pastoral management responsibilities to enable non-teaching Year leaders to communicate more easily with parents and students when problems arise. The students are guided and supported very effectively through the transition phase from the feeder middle schools into Year 9. There is good career advice using Connexions, aiding student transfer to post-16 education, employment or training. Good quality partnership work with local employers supports all students well in preparing for life after school. Persistent absentee students are well supported with alternative curricular options. Students' progress is closely monitored through regular six-weekly reviews, which helps to identify and support those who are underachieving against identified learning targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The headteacher provides clear direction for school improvement and is well supported by members of the senior leadership team. Although development planning enables senior leaders to gain an overview of the school's strengths and areas for further development, there is too great a variation in the collective quality and robustness of evidence to support the school's self-evaluation of its current provision. Middle management is good. Subject departments have a detailed understanding of their contribution to whole-school developments, with particularly successful contributions from the school's specialist subject area. Well defined link management roles and responsibilities ensure that a trusting and effective set of professional relationships exist across the school. Senior managers have responded positively to the areas for improvement raised in the previous inspection report. Opportunities for communication between the school and parents have increased over the past three years, including the introduction of a parents' forum aimed at increasing the dialogue between the school and home. However, despite these developments, one-fifth of parents responding in the inspection questionnaire said they would welcome even better communication, especially from senior staff at the school. Governors are effectively fulfilling their role to support the school and are beginning to understand more fully how to challenge and hold the school to account.

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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?	2	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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**

13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ponteland Community High School, Northumberland, NE20 9EY

You will know that five inspectors recently visited Ponteland to find out how well you are doing at school and, in turn, how well the school supports you to do the best of which you are capable.

I am sure you will be pleased to know that we have judged Ponteland High to be a good and improving school, which responds positively to the range of varying needs that you have.

Our main inspection judgements are:

- You achieve above average standards in the main school and your progress is good. In the sixth form standards are well above average and your achievement is outstanding.
- There has been a downward trend over the past two years in the number of you achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, which includes English and mathematics. This is because of boys' performance in mathematics, which lags behind that of the girls. Recent information indicates more of Year 11 will achieve the English and mathematics targets set, but boys' performance in mathematics is not closing the gap sufficiently quickly with that achieved by the girls.
- The progress of students with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding.
- The sixth form provision is outstanding overall, and in almost all aspects of its work.
- Personal development and well-being, including being healthier, safer, enjoying and attending school, and your preparation for the world of work are all good.
- Teaching is mostly good in the main school and sixth form; some is outstanding.
- The curriculum has been successfully extended to include a range of traditional, vocational and diploma courses. Staff are knowledgeable about the types of courses offered, but assessment of how these contribute to the progress and standards of different groups of students needs to be developed.
- The school provides good quality care, guidance and support in the main school; it is outstanding in the sixth form.
- Leadership and management are good in the main good and outstanding in the sixth form.
- The school has responded positively to the recommendations made in the previous inspection report in 2006; this includes communication with parents. Despite this, a significant number of parents writing in the inspection questionnaire indicated that they would want communication to improve further, especially with senior leaders. We are, therefore, asking the school to make further improvements in school to home communications.

Each and every one of you has an important part to play in helping the school to improve further. You must continue to attend regularly, work hard, behave well and show positive attitudes in all your lessons.

We wish you well for the future.

Brian Blake

Lead inspector