

Coquet High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122363
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327710
Inspection dates	4–5 February 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)	579
Sixth form	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Hall
Headteacher	Mr Paul Allen
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Acklington Road Amble Morpeth Northumberland NE65 0NG
Telephone number	01665 710636
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Age group	13–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Coquet is smaller than the average sized secondary school because it is part of a three-tier education system whereby the students start at the school in Year 9. Almost all the students are of White British heritage. There are fewer than average numbers of students eligible for free school meals. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average but, overall, the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than found nationally.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to raising standards in English at Key Stage 4; in developing more rigorous monitoring, marking and written feedback to ensure that all students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further; and developing more robust evaluation and monitoring of provision to ensure that all students achieve in line with their capabilities.

From broadly average standards at both the start and finish of Year 9, the number of students gaining five or more A* to C grades (higher grades) at GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 is close to average because of the increasing take-up of a greater variety of examination courses on offer. However standards in English and all areas of science, except biology, are below average, as is the proportion of students gaining at least five higher grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. Overall progress at Key Stage 4 is inadequate, despite an improving trend since the previous inspection. This is because students' standards and progress in English have both declined since the previous inspection in 2006, when the school was asked to improve standards in the subject. In addition, the school's own data indicate that while results at Key Stage 4 are set to improve over the next two years, standards would be below average, despite students' broadly average starting points. Overall, students' achievement is inadequate. Although standards have been improving at sixth form level since the previous inspection because of the greater numbers taking vocationally orientated courses, overall attainment at the highest level in A-level examinations declined from 2007, when it was below the national average.

Students' personal development and well-being are developing satisfactorily in both the main school and sixth form. The vast majority of students are reasonably au fait with the reasons for adopting a healthy lifestyle, particularly in terms of taking regular exercise and eating healthy foods. Most students say they enjoy school, although attendance is still below the national average. However, focused effort from the staff, together with a greater range of curricular choices have made students more aware and appreciative of what the school has to offer them in terms of their future economic well-being. The majority of teaching is satisfactory, occasionally good. However, too many lessons are teacher dominated, which limits the opportunities for students to work independently. In the sixth form, however, the students appreciate the different teaching styles because it gives them more opportunities for personal decision-making and independence in their learning. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and improving because of the increased opportunities for more students to study vocational subjects. Despite the good quality care and support provided for students, academic guidance is inadequate. Insufficient and inconsistent advice is provided to students in the main school, including marking, which too often fails to give specific advice on how to improve work in order to achieve or exceed identified learning targets.

The overall quality of leadership and management is inadequate because key issues from the previous inspection, in particular, standards and progress in English, and the approaches to marking and monitoring students' work have not improved. The school's evaluation of its performance is over-optimistic, and its analysis of some students' performance data in English is flawed. The lack of a formal record of progress against key priorities and actions from the school development plan has limited an accurate assessment of the school's strengths and

areas for further improvement. Although monitoring and evaluation of provision is satisfactory in Years 12 and 13, the contribution of the head of sixth form to these processes, especially in relation to teaching and learning, is underdeveloped. However, recent changes to the senior leadership team and governing body, to complement the formation of a hard federation with the local feeder middle schools, gives a clear indication that senior managers now appreciate what needs to be done to make the necessary improvements. Middle managers have also recently developed a more coherent approach to evaluating and monitoring provision, as a further aid to whole-school improvement. The capacity to improve is, therefore, satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students' attainment has improved since the previous inspection, although attainment at the highest level in A-level examinations declined from 2007, when it was below the national average. Students' progress in lessons is mainly satisfactory, occasionally better. The majority of students are developing a range of advanced skills, knowledge and understanding that are helping them to achieve satisfactorily against well defined end-of-course target grades. Overall students' achievement is satisfactory.

There are increasing numbers of students entering the sixth form because of the greater range of courses on offer; in particular, the vocational level 2 courses that successfully run in partnership with a local high school and a college of further education. This good balance of academic and vocational courses suits students' needs and interests well. Students enthusiastically undertake a range of responsibilities within the school community, especially in relation to the many volunteering opportunities made available to them. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, occasionally good. The students appreciate the different styles of teaching that they experience in their sixth form lessons, especially the opportunities for greater independence in their learning, both in and out of lessons.

There are satisfactory monitoring and evaluation systems in place, and a developing process for collecting and using performance data to monitor students' progress. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory, but involvement of the head of sixth form in all aspects of monitoring provision in Years 12 and 13, especially teaching and learning, is underdeveloped. Very good links have been established with local partners and some universities, which are helping to influence students' choices on post-school destinations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and science at Key Stage 4.
- Develop a more rigorous and consistent whole-school approach to monitoring, marking and written feedback to students to ensure they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Develop more robust evaluation and monitoring of provision to ensure that all students achieve in line with their capabilities.
- Develop further the monitoring and evaluation role of the head of sixth form to include all aspects of provision in Years 12 and 13, especially teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the school in Year 9 with broadly average standards, which are maintained to the end of Key Stage 3. Standards at Key Stage 4 are close to average in terms of the number of students gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE. However, the number gaining at least five higher grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is below average. Standards in English and all areas of science, except biology, are also below average. Although the school only has the students in Year 9, their progress through to the end of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory in the three core subjects. Overall progress at Key Stage 4 is inadequate, despite an improving trend since the previous inspection. This is because the students' standards and progress in English have declined since the previous inspection, when the school was asked to raise standards in the subject. The school's own data indicate that while the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades, with and without English and mathematics, is set to improve over the next two years, the results would be below average, despite the students' broadly average starting points. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities shows marginal improvements since the previous inspection. Although broadly satisfactory it is also affected by weaker progress in English. Overall, students' achievement is inadequate. At sixth form level standards have been improving because of the greater numbers entering for vocational courses, although attainment at the highest level in A-level examinations declined from 2007, when it was below the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development good. The students are gaining a deeper understanding of other world cultures through varied exchange programmes with schools in South Africa and France, and the opportunities to visit other countries as part of the extra-curricular range of activities on offer at the school; for example, skiing trips. The school's achievement in gaining the International Schools' Award is a reflection of the successful work in this area.

Students have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle through lessons in personal, social and health education, and many take advantage of the range of physical activities on offer during and after school. The students appreciate the range and quality of food available in the school canteen, and are developing a better understanding of how healthy food options can affect their well-being. Most students feel that school is a safe place and they are aware of the measures that contribute to this. Incidents of bullying are rare, and when they occur are effectively dealt with by staff. The students speak of their enjoyment of school and the varied range of opportunities it offers. Attendance is just below average, but improving because of the substantial, rigorous and sustained effort by the school. However, a number of parents take students on holiday in term time and this adversely affects the overall attendance rate. Behaviour is satisfactory overall but varies across the school, with a few of the younger students displaying unsatisfactory behaviour in some lessons; this has a detrimental effect on their own and others' progress. Students' contribution to both the school and wider communities is good, particularly through fund-raising events, which support a number of local and national charities. Sixth form students act successfully as peer tutors for those in the main school who need additional help with their learning. The school council satisfactorily represents the views of students, with recent elections seen very favourably by all who participated.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and characterised by good subject knowledge and secure and trusting relationships between adults and students. In the best lessons, planning is thorough and well matched to students' needs; learning objectives are precise and understood by all students. Introductory explanations are clear and used well to identify key learning points, and combined with skilful questioning throughout the lesson, help students to develop their understanding. Where lessons of this quality also have tasks that are varied and closely matched to the learning objectives, the vast majority of students make good or better progress and enjoy a real sense of achievement. However, in the majority of lessons, teaching and learning are satisfactory because some aspects of teaching restrict the opportunities for students to make progress matched to their capabilities. Too many lessons are teacher dominated and students are not given sufficient opportunities to work independently or assess each other's work. Some teachers talk for too long and do not give students the opportunity to improve their learning through discussion. Activities are sometimes mundane and do not sufficiently engage students in acquiring further knowledge and skills, as an aid to deepening their understanding. On occasions, time is wasted because the pace of learning is too slow and sometimes it is because transition between activities is not planned well enough. In the previous inspection, the school was asked to develop more rigorous monitoring, marking and written feedback to ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Although some teachers mark work regularly and provide comments that help students to improve their work, there is too much inconsistent practice across the school. Overall, the school has made inadequate progress in this area.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum in Year 9 is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the majority of students. There is effective extra support for small groups of students who experience difficulties and, as a result, they make good gains in their self-esteem. A few students also benefit from additional support with their reading, and the school has rightly put in place plans to introduce a reading programme so that all students can improve their literacy skills. In Years 10 and 11, the good range of technical, vocational and academic subjects is popular and suits the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of students across the full attainment range. Personalised learning programmes have been satisfactorily developed to engage those students who have identified learning needs. The sixth form curriculum offers a wide range of traditional and vocational pathways, which students appreciate and enjoy. A wide range of enrichment activities complements the curriculum. Students of all ages and abilities take advantage of the various sporting activities, clubs and societies. These activities, together with the personal, social and health education programme, make an important contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Productive links with local businesses support work experience and the school is building on these links and those with other schools and colleges to extend the work-related curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Although the school provides good quality care and support for its students, academic guidance is inadequate. Child protection procedures are in place and arrangements for safeguarding, including health and safety and risk assessments, are well established and well known by adults working in the school. Staff have a good understanding of students' pastoral needs and students feel safe in school. Students and parents/carers appreciate the quality of support provided by the school, exemplified by one parent's response in the inspection questionnaire: 'Teachers are ready to listen and are helpful to students.' Thorough monitoring and analysis of attendance have contributed to the improving trend in attendance since the previous inspection. Students have access to the learning support centre, which offers a calm, supportive environment for students experiencing problems. The students and parents receive good advice on the courses available at the end of Year 11, including the provision at the school, other local providers, and employment and training opportunities. The academic guidance provided to students is insufficient and inconsistent across the main school; it is satisfactory in the sixth form. In the main school, marking fails to give specific advice on what students need to do to improve their work in order to achieve or exceed their learning targets. Too often, work is unmarked or there is too little advice to students about its quality or points for further improvement. Students' progress is regularly assessed, but the accuracy of the data is unreliable. This means, therefore, that targeted support for ensuring that all students achieve in line with their capabilities is not wholly effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate overall because key issues highlighted in the previous inspection report have not improved. In particular, standards in English, and the approaches to marking students' work and to monitoring their progress towards identified targets are not good enough to enable all students to make the progress of which they are capable. The school's evaluation of its own performance is over-optimistic, and its analysis of some school-generated data in English is flawed. There is no formal record of evaluating progress against priorities and actions from the development plan, including raising standards and improving achievement in English. However, the recently formed hard federation with local feeder middle schools has brought about structural changes in the senior leadership team and the governing body; these have led to greater rigour in the way the school monitors its performance. As a result, there are clear indications that senior managers know what needs to be done to make the necessary improvements. Middle leaders are also developing a greater awareness of their roles and responsibilities, and parents have commented favourably on these promising signs. The school has a clear understanding of its place within the local area, and many recent initiatives have successfully engaged students with local community members, particularly in fund-raising events and linked work with the youth service. The success of this work is impacting positively on provision in school; for example, in extended vocational opportunities in the sixth form. Senior leaders are sensitive to the equality issues of its student population, but initiatives to bring about change are at a very early stage of implementation. Overall, the school provides inadequate 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	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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	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?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	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	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	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?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	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	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
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	4	
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?	Yes	

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

6 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Coquet High School, Northumberland, NE65 0NG

I recently visited Coquet, with two colleagues, to see how well you are doing at school. While there are many positive features about the school's provision, the failure to make the necessary progress in a number of important areas since the previous inspection in 2006 means that we are issuing the school with a notice to improve. This means that inspectors will visit the school again in around six months to assess the progress being made in the key areas for improvement. I am sure you would find it helpful if I outlined the main findings of the inspection.

- Although overall standards are average at the end of Key Stage 3, at Key Stage 4 they are below average in English and science, except biology, which is broadly average. The number of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades with English and mathematics is also below average. Despite an improvement in your overall progress since the previous inspection, achievement in English is inadequate. We are, therefore, asking the school to raise standards in English and science as an aid to improving your overall achievement at school.
- Standards are broadly average and progress is satisfactory in the sixth form, although attainment at the highest level in A-level examinations declined from 2007, when it was below the national average.
- Your personal development and well-being are satisfactory across the whole school.
- Teaching is mostly satisfactory, occasionally good in both the main school and sixth form. However, you have too few opportunities to work independently in lessons. The exception is in the sixth form where those who spoke with inspectors said you enjoy the greater independence that you get in your lessons.
- Marking is inconsistent across the school, and gives you too little information about the quality of your work. We are asking the school to improve this.
- The quality of care and support is generally good, but academic guidance is inadequate because of the lack of clear feedback to you from teachers about how well you are doing, or what you need to do to improve further. We are asking the school to improve the quality of all aspects of guidance.
- Leadership and management have not adequately addressed the key issues from the previous inspection. The school's assessment of the current quality of provision is over-optimistic, in part because the progress being made against actions and priorities in the school development plan is not formally recorded. We are, therefore, asking the school to develop a more rigorous and consistent whole-school approach to monitoring and evaluation of provision to ensure that all of you achieve in line with your capabilities.
- There are some recent encouraging signs of improvements in leadership and management, due to the changes in the structure of the senior leadership team and the governing body.
- Although the quality of monitoring work in the sixth form is satisfactory, we are asking the school to develop further the role of the head of sixth form in this respect to include all aspects of provision in Years 12 and 13, especially teaching and learning.

On behalf of the team, we should like to thank you for your cooperation during the inspection, and also to thank all those parents and carers who found time to complete and return the inspection questionnaire.

In order to help the school make the necessary improvements, all of you have an important part to play. You must attend school regularly, behave well, listen carefully to your teachers and work as hard as you can.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Brian Blake

Lead inspector

On behalf of the inspection team