

NCHS The Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124413
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328131
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Clifford
Headteacher	Jill Adamson
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2006
School address	Ostend Place Newcastle ST5 2QY
Telephone number	01782 667650
Fax number	01782 297435

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Inspection number	328131

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

NCHS The Science College is smaller than the average secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has fallen in the last few years and is below average. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds represent a much smaller proportion than the national average. The school became part of National Challenge in September 2008. The previous headteacher left in December 2008 and the school became part of a 'soft' federation with Clayton Hall Business and Language College, and an executive headteacher is now in post. The school is a specialist science school.

There is a separate privately managed nursery and a privately-run before and after school club on the site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. The 'soft' federation is of positive benefit to the school. Recent improvements have come about because of the outstanding and inspirational leadership and drive of the executive and associate headteachers who have acted quickly and resolutely to introduce systems and procedures to underpin leadership and management at all levels. Very effective support from the soft federation and from the local authority has strengthened teaching and the school's use of data, and is providing the school with good capacity for further improvement.

Standards in 2008 were well below average, partly due to turbulence in staffing in mathematics and English. However, although standards remain low, they are improving. Current monitoring shows that this year, students are on course to achieve much better than the previous year. The school's specialist science status has had a positive impact on the quality of learning for students in science, where teaching is good but it has had a limited impact in other subjects. The majority of students are making at least satisfactory progress. However, data are not used consistently across all departments and some students are still unclear about how to further improve their work. There has been considerable restructuring of staff and faculties and from this September, the school will be fully staffed with specialist staff teaching their specialisms. Student absenteeism has been vigorously tackled and attendance for external examinations has greatly improved. The existing curriculum does not provide a level of choice at Key Stage 4 that helps to raise standards and achievement. The school has been quick to recognise this and a new curriculum which addresses this, and allocates sufficient time for food technology in Key Stage 3, is in place for September 2009.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school has greatly improved because expectations are clear and understood by all students. The use of the 'quiet' room has further reduced disruption in lessons and ensured that fewer students are excluded. Although a few parents are still concerned about poor behaviour, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent summed up the view of many when she wrote that, 'I know that by the time she leaves, she will have achieved the best she possibly can and will be a confident young woman.'

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students are proud of their school and enjoy coming. They commented on the improvements which have come about since the new headteachers arrived. They talk warmly about staff and relationships are good. The school has a long history of caring well for students. This is seen in the care provided for vulnerable students. The nurture group in Years 7 and 8 supports them so that they cope well with the demands of main school lessons. The school ensures that students develop a good awareness of health and personal safety. Bullying and racism are rare and students are confident that incidents are dealt with promptly. Safeguarding procedures and risk assessments meet statutory requirements. Moral and social awareness are well developed, but opportunities for spiritual awareness and preparation for life in multicultural Britain are weaker.

The impact the school has on its local community is improving. The school is beginning to develop stronger links with feeder primary schools, and with parents of Year 6 pupils who are preparing to join the school in Year 7.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement further through improved consistency in the use of data for tracking students' progress and target setting so that all students know what they have to do to improve.
- Develop teachers' practice so that they are confident in allowing students opportunities for independent learning.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness to better prepare them for life in a multicultural society.

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

Since it became a National Challenge school, the tracking of students' progress in English and mathematics has improved and data shows most students are now making satisfactory progress. For example, last year 21% of students attained five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics but this year, 32% are expected to do so and 43% of Year 11 students are on course to achieve five A* to C grades. Music and science are strengths of the school, students achieve results that are above the national average at GCSE and there are a large number of passes at higher grades. The school uses data to track how well students are doing but this is inconsistent. Teachers' assessment of course work is accurate. Improvements in mathematics have been brought about through the high quality of support provided through the 'soft' federation. Students now have the opportunity for early entry in mathematics and English in Year 10. Progress in science continues to be good. Those students taking triple science are on course for 100% A* to C grades and those on double science, 35.5%. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 remain low, but are improving. The school's own data shows that in mathematics, 72% of students have gained Level 5 or higher and in English 43.6% of students have gained Level 6. These exceed the school's challenging targets. The identification and support strategy for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say that they enjoy school and know how to keep themselves safe. Their attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. Students behave well in lessons and around the school site, and have respect for each other, the school and their local community. They regularly work with each other on tasks that help them to develop the skills that they require for the world of work, although standards in mathematics and English still do not give pupils the best chance of future success. The school recognises this and supporting these students better is a priority. Most students choose to eat and drink healthily and speak positively of the food provided by the school. Participation rates in physical education are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the increasing amount of good teaching, the teachers' good subject knowledge, thorough planning and enthusiastic delivery ensures students engage well with the lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use good pace and a range of teaching and learning styles effectively to ensure learners make good progress. More able students are challenged effectively and are encouraged to be aspirational in their work. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, the teacher used GCSE assessment criteria to raise students' aspirations. Very good behaviour was evident in most lessons, creating a positive learning environment. In the satisfactory lessons, a lack of pace and challenge, particularly for the most able, slows learning. Most lessons are predominantly teacher led and this limits the opportunities for students to develop skills for independent learning. Marking and assessment are inconsistent across the school. Assessment is beginning to be used effectively in English so that students know what their targets are and what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school does not comply with statutory requirements to deliver food technology at Key Stage 3. The headteachers have acted swiftly to address this issue and have appointed a teacher to deliver this subject from the start of the next academic year in a newly equipped room. The curriculum provides limited choices for students wanting to study vocational courses in Key Stage 4, but this has been addressed in preparation for the next academic year by introducing more flexibility into option choices and spending more time on literacy and numeracy. Opportunities are missed for students to develop spiritual awareness and the school is not preparing learners well for life in a multicultural society. Completion of adult literacy and numeracy tests, and qualifications in skills for working life, mean that all students are expected to leave Year 11 this year with at least one qualification. Social and moral development is very well catered for in lessons and throughout the school day. The school acknowledges there are limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme has good uptake and more vulnerable students are particularly targeted to enable them to take advantage of this opportunity alongside their peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Arrangements for safeguarding are secure and robust. Very thorough risk assessments are in place to cover the variety of building and improvement work that is going on at the school. Accurate records are kept of any bullying and racist incidents, and students feel safe at school. Students report that behaviour is managed well and that any bad behaviour is always dealt with. Strategies to encourage good attendance have resulted in a reduction in the number of students who are persistent absentees. The number of students not in education, employment or training (NEET) is below the national average. 'Spotlighting' students for intervention from a learning mentor or a member of the leadership team has proved to be an effective strategy for raising students' confidence and self-esteem and improving coursework. Academic mentoring will be introduced from September for all students in Years 9, 10 and 11. There are very good

transition arrangements in place. Close liaison with feeder primary schools ensures that all students, particularly the more vulnerable learners, settle in well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The outstanding executive and associate headteachers have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and this underpins their strategic plan for the school's development. They have put in place good structures that have developed and supported leadership and management at all levels. As a result, both senior leaders and middle managers are increasingly taking responsibility. They are now using challenging targets to raise standards. The co-opting of two middle managers to the senior leadership team has strengthened the capacity of both middle and senior leadership. Leadership is now proactive and decisions are shared and understood in terms of the impact on the learner. Judgments concerning teaching and learning are now secure and promote improvement. The school has taken effective steps to strengthen equality of opportunity through developing a nurture group in Years 7 and 8, and using a 'quiet' room, which has significantly reduced exclusions, maintains their learning and ensures students are effectively re-integrated back into the classroom. Although the senior team inherited a deficit budget and a financial system that did not meet financial management standards, it is now providing satisfactory value for money. The school buildings are being developed and the library improved with books chosen by students. Both resourcing and the delivery of information and communication technology are being enhanced. Governors are now acting as critical friends and challenging the school. Formerly, there were inadequate structures in place and governors were not given sufficient information to effectively hold the school to account. The school has worked hard to make an impact on its local community and has established a positive parenting programme and renewed its links with primary schools through its science specialism. However, it has not developed national and international aspects of community cohesion.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	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?	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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
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
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**

10 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of NCHS The Science College, Newcastle, ST15 2QY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school in the summer term. It was very interesting listening to your views which have greatly helped us. We were very impressed by how smart you are in your uniforms and your politeness, courtesy and helpfulness to us. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what your school could do to further improve.

This is a satisfactory school which, with the help of your new headteachers, has begun to improve and has some good features. The school has outstanding leadership from your two headteachers and they have already put in place measures to improve the school. These include improving the curriculum from September and reducing the disruption in lessons so that you settle to learning better. Attendance has improved so you are able to take up the opportunities school offers you.

We agree with you that you attend a very caring school with staff that work hard and do their best for you. Your behaviour and relationships are good with staff and each other. Teaching in lessons has improved and work is matched to your needs.

You know how to make healthy choices and stay safe. You enjoy school and, although bullying and racism are rare, they are dealt with promptly. There are plenty of opportunities for moral and social development, but your understanding of spiritual and cultural issues is weaker.

In order to improve further we have asked the school to:

- provide you with more opportunities for learning independently
- ensure that you are always clear what you need to do to improve your work
- better prepare you for life in a multicultural society through more opportunities to develop spiritual and cultural understanding.

Yours faithfully

Michelle Parker

Her Majesty's Inspector