

Sir Thomas Wharton Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106787
Local Authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	331290
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

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)	1087
Sixth form	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ernest Hardy
Headteacher	Mrs M McCorry
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
School address	Tait Avenue Edlington Doncaster South Yorkshire DN12 1HH
Telephone number	01709 864100
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average college where the vast majority of students are of White British heritage. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds. While a significant number are from areas of some social and economic disadvantage, eligibility for free meals matches the national average. Although few students have a statement of special educational need, the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. In January 2009 the college, which has a specialism in business and enterprise, opened in newly built premises. Awards include Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark, Excellence in Enterprise and Investors in People. During the inspection, no sixth form lessons could be observed because of examinations and study leave.

When inspected in May 2008 the college was given a Notice to Improve. Areas for improvement were students' achievement, the quality of teaching, the use of assessment information, and attendance. A monitoring visit in January 2009 judged that the college was making satisfactory progress in tackling these issues.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this college no longer requires significant improvement. Sir Thomas Wharton is a satisfactory and improving college. The move to a new building has stimulated more pride in students and more determination to succeed from staff. Strategies for improvement are clear to all, resulting in a growing sense of purpose and optimism.

Standards are rising. They are now broadly average, and students' achievement from their average starting points is satisfactory. Recent test and examination results show a significant improvement. However, given underachievement in past years, there remains scope for further improvement in standards at GCSE level and particularly in mathematics across the college. Close attention is being paid to the pace of students' progress in Key Stage 3 and improvements augur well for the future. Managers have successfully used the move to a state-of-the-art building to change students' attitudes and raise staff's expectations. Attendance has improved. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are planned better and are more interesting. Teachers make good use of new technology but they could offer more opportunities for students to use it. In response to the previous inspection, teachers are trying to get students more involved in lessons, for instance, in practical activities and discussion. This is proving successful but in a significant minority of lessons teachers give students too much leeway. Most students behave well, but a small minority are difficult and sometimes unruly. This frustrates the majority, who would like some teachers to take a firmer line on misbehaviour. There is some variation in teachers' expectations of homework, and the quality and regularity of marking. As a result, some students are less clear about what they need to concentrate on to improve their work. This means that the good and detailed assessment system, which gives teachers and students a clear picture of progress, is not as effective as it could be. Relationships are good. Students appreciate the way staff care for them and the time they give to help. The curriculum is satisfactory. The extra-curricular activities, clubs and visits which teachers willingly organise are strengths of the college.

Restructured leadership and management are giving clear direction. All aspects of the school's work are now satisfactory. The headteacher's firm and principled leadership and determination not to avoid difficult decisions have been vitally important. An expanded senior leadership team shares the vision of how the college can improve and shows the determination to bring this about. Clearer accountability and improved monitoring are the keys here. The progress already made in improving standards and achievement while preparing for the successful mid-year transfer to the new building shows that capacity to improve further is good. The college has made judicious use of good-quality support from the local authority, external consultants and advanced-skills teachers.

Many parents are happy with what the college offers, but a significant number have concerns. Inspection evidence indicates that the college is moving steadily in the right direction. However, inspectors agree with parents that teaching is still too variable in quality, that homework and marking are not consistent enough, and some misbehaviour is not handled firmly. Additionally, there could be quicker and more detailed responses to some issues which individual parents raise.

After a fallow period, the specialism in business and enterprise is beginning to have a positive impact across the college. Managers are more aware of what is required to bring this about and

there are better links with junior schools and improved ones with a community education centre. There is a renewed energy to get things moving and some imaginative planning to bring this about. The curriculum, with some provision for information and communication technology (ICT), enterprise activities and a guided business option at Key Stage 4, now has an appropriate focus on the specialism. However, establishing enterprise thinking and activities across the curriculum is embryonic. Nonetheless, standards are beginning to rise, the specialism has a clearer sense of direction, and students are starting to appreciate being in a specialist college.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Over recent years, students have joined the sixth form with below average GCSE grades. Traditionally, their achievement has been satisfactory, with average standards at A level. Results declined in 2008. Apart from applied subjects and art, standards were below average and achievement was inadequate in all subjects apart from expressive arts, art, general studies and history. The college responded swiftly. Changes to the management of the sixth form and closer tracking of progress and monitoring of lesson quality all took place. The quality of teaching and assessment has improved over recent months. Rigorous assessment shows that students' achievement is now satisfactory, although science subjects remain a relative weakness. Attendance, which was inadequate in the last report, has improved significantly since January 2009. Most students are at least meeting the college's attendance target, but the remainder are still not attending regularly enough. Management of the sixth form is satisfactory. Managers have sustained a varied curriculum which offers appropriate progression routes for students with a wide range of abilities. There is now a clearer focus on expecting students to take more responsibility for working towards their targets. Improved induction courses are helping more students to gain the confidence to think and work more independently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' standards at GCSE, and in mathematics across the college.
- Tackle less successful teaching where students are not expected to work hard enough, homework is irregular, and marking is inconsistent.
- Improve the disruptive behaviour of a minority of students.
- Reduce absence levels in the sixth form.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are rising in both key stages and achievement has become satisfactory. GCSE results improved slightly in 2008 but targets were not met. The exceptions were for lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whose achievement was satisfactory. Given their average standards on entry to the college, too many other students underachieved, particularly in Key Stage 3. There was some improvement in English results but those in mathematics remained poor. Generally, students' standards varied too much between subjects. The college responded with a focus on improving the quality of lessons and by regular and detailed tracking of students' progress. As a result, the legacy of underachievement is being successfully tackled. This has had a marked effect on standards. Early results from

examinations already taken show that most targets are likely to be met this year, and that there will be a significant improvement in the percentage of students gaining five higher grade GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Importantly, students in Key Stage 3 are achieving better as seen in much improved results from moderated optional tests. However, while standards in mathematics are improving rapidly, they are still adrift of those in other subjects. This has a negative effect on standards across the specialism, despite good results in business and improving results in ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development is satisfactory. Students get on well together and have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. They are increasingly aware of others' ideas and feelings and of the importance of taking these into account. They are interested in the culture of other societies, but many have a limited awareness of the range of cultures, beliefs and religions in present-day Britain. Although some incidents do still occur, students say that bullying is on the wane and comment that college 'is more like a family now'. Students make a positive contribution to the community through a range of activities including fundraising and the college's involvement in initiatives with South Yorkshire Police and the Fire Service. Behaviour is satisfactory: the good attitudes of the majority are blemished by a minority of disruptive students. Since the last inspection, close monitoring by senior managers, the attendance officer and form tutors has resulted in reduced absence levels. Attendance is close to average. Students say they feel safe in college and enjoy lessons. They have a good understanding of the importance of a balanced diet and regular exercise to stay healthy. They are better prepared for future life and work. This is partly because their standards in English and mathematics are rising and partly because they are responding well to increased opportunities to work together, as seen in the work of the college council and peer mentors.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is improving. Regular checks on lesson quality, combined with follow-up training and coaching, have raised teachers' confidence and enthusiasm. The result is more lessons which are good, and a reduction in inadequate teaching. However, too many lessons are no better than satisfactory. In most lessons relationships are good. Students are clear about the purpose of the lesson because teachers plan carefully and explain clearly. Established routines help students work well together. Purposeful starts to lessons are followed by suitable pace and challenge in tasks. Effective questioning helps students explore ideas and understand what they have learned. However, in some lessons activities do not always motivate students enough, especially when teachers are vague about how much work should be completed. At times there is too little use of brisk, specific and tightly timed tasks. When this happens progress slows and students become restless. The pattern of homework is inconsistent so that too few students get used to extended study. Marking is of variable quality. It is too often cursory or limited to a few words of encouragement, failing to identify what students need to do to improve. While the new building has significantly improved the learning environment, students do not get enough chances to use new technology.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The college provides a satisfactory curriculum which increasingly matches the needs and interests of students. The Key Stage 3 curriculum supports the development of literacy and numeracy for less able students through nurture groups and catch-up programmes. A course to develop the social and emotional aspects of learning for younger students has been introduced to good effect. Most students have good attitudes to study, and work together more cooperatively as a result. The college has widened the range of options, accreditation and vocational courses at Key Stage 4, partly due to effective partnerships with the South West Doncaster Consortium. All students study a subject from the specialism but the impact, particularly in the use of ICT, is not well developed across the college. The opportunity for all students to take GCSE English and mathematics in Year 10 is leading to greater motivation. A high proportion of students take part in an impressive range of enrichment activities from across the curriculum. Students are particularly appreciative of residential experiences, sporting opportunities and expressive arts provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care and guidance within the college are satisfactory and pastoral support is good. Arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and are reviewed regularly. All staff are trained in child protection. Vulnerable students are closely monitored and supported through the inclusion facility. The college has developed effective relationships with a range of outside agencies. The introduction of a 'house system' and the smaller 'vertical' tutor groups has begun to have a positive effect because they offer better support to individuals. Students say that staff are available and helpful when they need someone to turn to. Good transition arrangements before and after the move from primary school help most students to settle quickly, although some need more guidance in how to translate this into hard work and good behaviour. Students appreciate the quality of advice they get about GCSE options and opportunities in the sixth form, but feel that more could be done to advise about post-16 options outside the college. More detailed and accurate assessment information is effective in tracking students' progress and raising their ambitions, but precise guidance about exactly where they need to focus their efforts remains inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her senior leadership team have enthused staff with their clear vision of how the college needs to improve and how this can be brought about. New line management structures, alongside an intensive programme of checking lessons and staff training, mean that senior and middle leaders have a good picture of strengths and weaknesses in all areas. This has enabled them to improve the quality of teaching and students' rates of progress. Staff and the great majority of students now support the breadth and pace of improvement, even though it has been challenging. Closer and quicker identification of students who may be underachieving is linking with the good level of personal support to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. These developments, and the sensible and secure systems which have brought them about, demonstrate the good capacity for improvement. The college is on the

way to meeting the ambitious targets set by managers. Governors support and challenge the college conscientiously. They are fully aware of the progress that has been made and the improvements that are still needed. Value for money is satisfactory. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Progress in improving relationships within the college has been good. Students contribute to the local community, for example, through their involvement in a drug awareness initiative. College leaders appreciate the need to extend students' understanding of cultural diversity at a national and international level.

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

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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	IE 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	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
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**

Inspection of Sir Thomas Wharton Community College, Doncaster,

DN12 1HH

We recently inspected your college to see whether there has been enough progress in the 12 months since you, staff and governors were told that the college needed to improve. You will be pleased to learn that there has, and that the school now does a satisfactory job and no longer requires a notice to improve.

Thank you for being so welcoming and willing to talk to us. Most of you are really proud of your new building and uniform, and appreciate the efforts teachers are making for you. A minority of students can be disruptive and you say that this annoys you and can interrupt your lessons. Please keep up your own good attitudes so that the minority feel under pressure to get down to work. In some lessons, not enough is expected from you in terms of work and effort. While many more lessons are good, homework is not set regularly enough, and not all teachers pay enough attention to marking it and advising you how to reach higher standards. The tracking system is good at helping you understand what to aim for, but guidance needs to be clearer to help you get there. You are making a real effort with attendance, which has improved, but sixth form students still have too much time off. The progress you make in lessons and the standard of work you are reaching are both better than at the time of the last inspection. However, results at GCSE and in mathematics across the college need to be higher. The headteacher and senior staff have a good and accurate view of what works well and what needs to be done to improve. We are confident that they are doing things the right way.

We have asked the college to make improvements by:

- helping you to get better examination results, especially in mathematics
- improving those lessons where you are not expected to work hard enough, your work is not marked properly, or you do not get enough homework
- tackling more firmly the disruptive behaviour of a minority of students
- getting some sixth form students to attend more regularly.

You can help by trying to give of your best each day in terms of work and behaviour.