

Netherthorpe School and Science Specialist College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112985
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	338068
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1125
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father William Butt
Headteacher	Mr A Senior
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
School address	Ralph Road Chesterfield Derbyshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 39 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, looked at a range of documentation and undertook an analysis of the 338 questionnaires returned by parents, and those returned by students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by individual and groups of students
- the contribution of the specialist status in science to the overall quality of education provided
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, especially the consistency of provision between subjects
- the impact of recent reorganisation and restructuring to bring about further overall improvements
- the effectiveness of the sixth form.

Information about the school

Netherthorpe School and Science Specialist College is larger than most secondary schools. The great majority of students come from White British backgrounds. Only a small number of students are from minority ethnic background and there are no students with English as an additional language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Netherthorpe has a Healthy School award. The headteacher was appointed in February 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a rapidly improving and popular school with a growing sixth form. It is a caring school where every student is valued by the school community. It is held in high regard by parents. As one wrote, 'My son has developed into a responsible, hardworking young man. He has been given so many opportunities which all help to develop his skills. We could not have asked for more from the school and the dedicated teaching staff.' Staff, students and governors are actively involved in making this a strongly inclusive school which is raising the aspirations of all its students, and particularly those who are vulnerable. Staff, students and parents share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the school's aspiration to be a high performing school. Students are rightly proud of their school and enjoy their learning experiences as reflected in their good attendance.

Students of all abilities make good progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Those who are vulnerable make outstanding progress from their starting point because of the personalised programme which meets both their personal and academic needs. As one student put it, 'Teachers are great. They listen and help me with my personal problems and help me do well in lessons. I like it when I get rewarded, it makes me work even harder.' Attainment is continuing to rise, particularly since the school has improved its tracking systems. The school is now able to accurately identify students' individual needs and ensure that these are met. The quality of teaching and learning is good and students enjoy their lessons. In the best lessons seen, teachers use a range of teaching strategies to both engage and challenge students. Particularly effective are those lessons where students are encouraged to work in small groups, and where opportunities are given for them to discuss their work in ways that develop their thinking. Where teaching is less successful, teachers have the tendency to indulge in overly long explanations and pose questions that do not always challenge the students' thinking. Assessment information is not always used to plan lessons that support and meet the needs of individual students. Work is not always consistently marked and students do not always know what they need to do to improve their work. The good practice that exists in most of the teaching is not shared fully across the school.

The school has identified raising achievement in English and mathematics as a top priority and is implementing a rigorous programme for improvement. The effects of this can clearly be seen in the better progress of current students, for example the progress of girls. The school's science specialist status has made a significant contribution to the good curriculum and teaching, and inspectors saw some impressive practice in the teaching of science, both within the school and through its links with the partner primary

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schools.

Students of all ages display maturity and take responsibility for their good behaviour in and around the school. They speak proudly of their school and how staff help them to do well. The quality of the care, guidance and support for students is outstanding, and especially so for those who are vulnerable. The school works with families, students and a range of agencies to sustain the learning, development and well-being of individual students facing challenging circumstances. Another outstanding feature is the contribution made by students to the school and the community. A large number of students play an active role in the life of the school as, for example, mentors, sports leaders and school councillors. The school acknowledges that its strategy to promote community cohesion at national and international levels is satisfactory and is looking to develop this area of its work.

The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work are not sufficiently effective at all levels to ensure accountability for the outcomes achieved by students. Not enough responsibility has been given to middle managers so that they become more effective in leading and managing their subjects and holding staff fully to account. Governance is good and senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Resources are effectively deployed and value for money is good as is the school's capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the overall attainment in the school by:
 - securely embedding good practice in assessment, marking and feedback to students by telling them precisely how to improve their work in all subjects
 - building on the best practice in teaching that already exists so that teaching is consistently good and outstanding
 - ensuring appropriate levels of challenge that match the needs of individual students
 - ensuring students have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their learning through sustained periods of independent work without too much teacher input.
- Give greater responsibility to middle managers so that they become more effective in leading and managing their subjects and holding staff fully to account.
- Broaden students' awareness and understanding of other cultures in Britain and around the world.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

There is an improving trend in attainment. All students make at least good progress in lessons and over their time in school. The very large majority of students are keen to do well, respond well to the aspirational targets that are set for them and demonstrate good, and often outstanding, attitudes to learning in lessons. The 2009 unvalidated

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national data shows that, in most key subjects, the proportion of students gaining higher level qualifications is broadly in line with national averages, with 52% of students gaining five or more higher grades in GCSE, including English and mathematics. In English literature, design and technology, and sciences, standards were significantly higher than the national averages. These results are the best in the school's history, and current tracking data suggest that results look to continue to improve. The school recognises that boys are not making the same rate of progress as girls and have devised strategies to help them by, for example, developing a curriculum that best meets their specific interests.

Students value their school and speak highly of it. They say they feel safe and a large majority of parents and carers say the school keeps their children safe. Students say that instances of bullying are rare and, if any was to occur, they know who to go to, including the many mentors that the school has trained over the years. Many students take advantage of the healthy food options available in the school dining room. Many take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, including a wide range of sporting, physical and outdoor activities offered by the school. Many students willingly take part in a variety of opportunities to contribute to the life of the school community including, for example, mentoring other students, sports leadership programmes and being involved in supporting teaching and learning. Students show generosity and commitment in not only helping students in the school but also in raising money for charitable causes and they are involved in projects to improve aspects of their local community. Discussions with students however, revealed lack of in-depth understanding of other cultures in Britain or the global communities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

In the lessons seen during the inspection, students showed a desire to learn and behaved very well when teaching was planned carefully and focused on what the school's assessment data revealed about the needs of individual students.

Students enjoy their learning and are eager to do well in lessons especially when they are actively involved. Students respond particularly well to group activities where they are given the opportunity to develop their thinking and work with others to develop their ideas and challenge each other. The teaching is less successful when teachers do not use information on performance to plan for the diverse needs of students. Although there are examples of good marking that gives students clear guidance on how they can improve their work, this is not consistently in place across the school.

The curriculum provides a broad range of experiences and is continuously being revised and developed to meet the learning needs and interest of individual students. A number of vocational courses have been introduced, for example horticulture, and others are planned in the future. The work-related curriculum is a particular strength and is enhanced by the partnerships and support which arise from the school's specialist status. Many Year 10 students spend two weeks on work-related experience and students in Year 11 have the opportunity to choose from a range of vocational courses. Outstanding care, guidance and support help students of all abilities, and particularly those who are vulnerable, to make the best of the opportunities the school offers. The school successfully involves other agencies to ensure student's diverse needs are met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his senior leadership team have quickly created a culture of rapid improvement with a clear vision shared by the school community. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by new appointments in key areas, for example to

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reinvigorate the development of the sixth form, teaching and learning, and data analysis to inform assessment and teaching and learning. Senior leaders take decisive actions to tackle underperformance. For example, curriculum arrangements have created new opportunities for students to select from a broad range of options which include vocational choices both at Key Stage 4 and sixth form. The school recognises that they need to build the capacity of the middle leadership team to enable them to hold their staff to account so that improvements in achievement and teaching in all subjects are consistent.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Barriers to learning are being tackled, especially the achievement of boys in some subjects. Community cohesion is encouraged within the school and local community. However, not enough has been done to broaden student's horizons beyond the wider community outside Chesterfield as well as the wider world.

Governors understand and carry out their statutory responsibilities well. They have a good knowledge of the school and its staff and are well informed about the school's strengths and what it needs to do to further improve. Governors support and challenge the school appropriately and do not shy away from making difficult decisions.

All regulations for safeguarding students are met and the school ensures the arrangements for doing so are fully in line with government requirements and guidance on good practice. The arrangements for carrying out checks on staff are robust.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

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Inspection evidence confirms the school's own view that outcomes and overall effectiveness are satisfactory. Students make broadly satisfactory progress from their wide range of starting points and reach average standards in attainment. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and a high proportion of them complete their chosen courses. Many go on to further and higher education, training and employment.

Teaching is mostly good and students make good progress in lessons, but there is some variation between performance in different subjects. There has been a significant increase in the level of attention given to students' academic progress by senior leaders in the sixth form. The leadership and management are effective in accommodating students of varying abilities in the sixth form. This has led the school to review the curriculum to increase the number of vocational courses on offer. Students make an excellent contribution to life in school by taking on a variety of leadership roles including, for example, as mentors. They are highly respected, particularly by younger students. As one student said, 'I enjoy talking to my mentor because I know she will help me.' Students are prepared well for the next phase of their lives, whether it is in education or employment.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The parents of over a third of students responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. The vast majority were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the school's work. Many praised specific aspects, including the care and support offered to them and their children. The great majority of the respondents stated that their children were happy, well cared for and enjoyed attending the school. Parents feel well informed about the progress their children are making. As one parent wrote, 'I feel that communication has improved since the new headteacher has taken over', and another, 'Staff are approachable and helpful when any concerns are raised.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Netherthorpe School and Science Specialist College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The Inspection team received 338 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1125 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	162	48	163	48	15	4	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	169	50	164	49	4	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	208	61	125	37	7	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	183	54	142	42	12	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	178	52	158	46	4	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	135	41	176	54	15	5	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	94	29	214	65	19	6	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	162	50	154	47	9	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	170	51	159	48	5	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	172	52	150	45	8	2	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	110	35	193	61	15	5	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	176	54	149	46	2	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	207	62	124	37	4	1	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Netherthorpe School and Science Specialist College, Chesterfield S43 3PU

Thank you very much for all your help during our visit to your school. We found what you had to say very interesting and it helped us to make our judgments about your school. We were pleased to hear that so many of you enjoy attending school. Many of you told us how friendly and helpful the staff are and how much you enjoy the range of subjects you study. We were pleased to see so many of you willingly take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly those linked with your school's science specialism.

We judged your school to be good. The curriculum is rich and varied, allowing you to develop well as young people. It provides you with many opportunities to develop a wide range of skills. Your teachers are helpful and supportive and most make your lessons interesting by involving you in learning. The quality of care, guidance and support you receive is outstanding and you are well prepared for the future. We were particularly impressed with the contribution you make to the school and wider community. A large number of you act as mentors and prefects and as ambassadors for the school. We were also very impressed with your knowledge and understanding about adopting healthy lifestyles, although we noticed that some of you did not always practise them.

We worked very closely with your headteacher and other staff and agreed on what the school should do to make it even better. We have asked the school to:

- raise the overall attainment by:
- embedding good practice in assessment, marking and feedback to you by telling you precisely how to improve your work in all subjects
- building on the best practice in teaching that already exists so that teaching is consistently good and outstanding
- ensuring appropriate levels of challenge that match your needs
- ensuring that you have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning through sustained periods of independent work without too much input from teachers
- give greater responsibility to middle managers so that they become more effective

in leading and managing their areas of responsibilities

- help you to become more aware of the various communities and their different cultures in Britain and the world around you.

Many of you, I know, already make a very important contribution to the school and I am sure all of you will want to do everything you can to support the staff in making Netherthorpe even better.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector

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