

Blyth Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132189
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	315959
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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	1173
6th form	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Barlow
Headteacher	Ms Bridget Knowles
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2005
School address	Chase Farm Drive Blyth Northumberland NE24 4JP
Telephone number	01670 798100
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Age group	13-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Blyth Community College is a larger than average high school. The College is subject to reorganisation proposals and is due to take students aged 11–19 from 2010. It serves the town of Blyth and the surrounding area which is more socio-economically disadvantaged than is the case nationally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The vast majority of students are White British and there are very few who have English as an additional language. Above average numbers of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has an Artsmark gold award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Blyth Community College is an improving school which provides a satisfactory education for its students. The inspirational leadership of the new headteacher has re-energised the school. There is a crystal clear focus, shared by all staff, on raising students' attainment, improving behaviour and promoting the strengths of the college.

Leaders and managers are aware that past GCSE examination results have not been good enough and need to improve. They have taken strong action to address this issue. The school has set itself very challenging targets, monitors students' progress in the main school with great care and successfully boosts the learning of any student who is in danger of underachieving. This robust action has resulted in improved standards and satisfactory student achievement. Evidence of this is now seen in improved modular examination results in mathematics and science, in increased numbers of students who are on track to meet their targets and in the satisfactory and sometimes good progress students are making in lessons. Standards remain below average but this represents satisfactory progress for students given their below average starting points when they enter the school.

The care, support and guidance students receive are good and are a strength of the school. In addition to close academic monitoring, all students are given good personal support, particularly the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The health, safety and well-being of students are at the heart of the school's work. They are given satisfactory opportunities to develop workplace skills and contribute to the community. Students' personal development is satisfactory. The school's recent efforts to improve behaviour are succeeding. There is now a more consistent approach to managing behaviour and a clear range of sanctions are in place for any student who disturbs the learning of others. Attendance remains stubbornly well below average although the school employs every reasonable strategy to improve it.

Students are making satisfactory progress because teaching is satisfactory overall. In some lessons students make good progress because teaching is lively, learning methods are varied, expectations are high and the pace of work is brisk. However, in too many lessons teaching and learning methods are not sufficiently varied and challenging fully to engage students' interest and make them enthusiastic about learning. The curriculum is satisfactory but the school is now reviewing it further so that it better meets the needs of students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides its students with a satisfactory standard of education. They transfer to Year 12 with a below average profile of attainment. Progress is adequate so their course results generally represent satisfactory achievement. Results in AS and A-level subjects were similar to and below average in 2006 and 2007. The proportion of students gaining pass grades in the range A-E was average but numbers of higher grade results were below average. In 2007, pass rates in AS English literature and biology were lower than they should have been but students did well in sports studies. Level three vocational course results were average. Results in level two vocational courses in 2007 were particularly good and enabled students to access further training and qualifications.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Sixth formers benefit from access to a wide range of academic A-level courses and some vocational programmes. Most

complete the courses they embark upon. Personal welfare arrangements are good. Links with local universities are particularly good and routes to further education and training are clear. In 2007, 30 students gained places on degree courses at universities. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and enable students to achieve broadly as expected. However, the setting of challenging targets and the frequency and rigour of monitoring students' progress towards them are insufficiently developed. Students present as mature young adults and are positive about the sixth form. Their attendance is satisfactory. They say that they really value the choice of courses, the amount of support and guidance they receive and the way that their work is constructively marked. Facilities for independent learning are good. Value for money is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the results attained in GCSE examinations.
- Raise attendance.
- Increase the proportion of good lessons by using more varied and challenging methods of teaching and learning.
- In the sixth form, improve procedures for setting targets and tracking students' progress towards them.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are below average and achievement is satisfactory. Students enter the school in Year 9 when they are two thirds of the way through their Key Stage 3 education. Therefore, standards and achievement data across Key Stage 3 have to be interpreted with care. Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average. Above average numbers of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the learning of some is inhibited by low literacy levels, poor attendance and behavioural issues. In the 2006 Year 9 tests, students attained below average results but, given their starting points, they achieved well. In 2007, standards remained below average and although achievement, particularly in English, fell from the previous year, it was satisfactory and school targets were met.

Overall standards reached in GCSE examinations have been low for the last three years. The percentage of students gaining five or more A*–C grades improved in 2006 but fell slightly in 2007 although the percentage of students attaining five higher GCSE grades including mathematics and English remained the same. Value added data indicate that students' overall achievement at Key Stage 4 declined in 2006 and again in 2007. Students' achievement in English improved from the previous year and was considerably better than that in mathematics. School targets were not met. Students achieved best in communication studies, design technology, French and music and least well in business studies, history, mathematics and physical education.

However, although examination results indicate there may have been underachievement in the past, current inspection evidence indicates that standards are rising to below average and the achievement of all groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities, is now satisfactory. These improvements are the result of a raft of measures the school has put in place to boost students' learning. The impact of this work is now seen in mathematics and science where modular examination results for students in Years 10 and 11 show a significant improvement. Detailed school data shows increased numbers of students are on track to meet their targets in all subjects; during the inspection, students were seen making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students say they enjoy coming to college, especially when lessons are practical, relevant and interesting. However, despite the best efforts of the school, their attendance is well below average. They usually work hard and are friendly, polite and supportive of one another. Behaviour is satisfactory and students say they feel safe and secure in school. They say that a small proportion of lessons are disrupted by a minority of students, but that these disruptions are dealt with swiftly and with increasing consistency. Although there is some bullying, robust action is taken to deal with it. The students appreciate that there is always someone to turn to for help in times of need. They know how to stay healthy, eat wholesome lunches and take advantage of the many opportunities to take exercise within and outside the school day. They would welcome a school council which would give them a voice in the school. Students develop a satisfactory range of skills for employment and future learning.

Students make a positive contribution to their local community and to communities further afield through activities such as charity fundraising. Students' moral and social development is satisfactory and they know the difference between right and wrong. Cultural and spiritual development is also satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where lessons are challenging, expectations high and positive relationships between teachers and students exist, teaching and learning are good. In these lessons, there are some common features which help students make good progress. The purpose of the lesson is shared and reviewed. Marking and feedback from teachers and peers help students understand how to improve their work. A range of interesting and challenging activities are used to support learning. There is evidence that these attributes, in mathematics for example, are supporting rising standards. Even in some of these good lessons, however, more able students are not sufficiently challenged as teachers do not plan activities which cater specifically for their needs.

There are, however, too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching which impact on learning. In weaker, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons teachers often talk for too long. Consequently, students are not encouraged to think and learn independently. Management of time, low expectations, mundane tasks and lack of guidance on how to improve performance are characteristics of some satisfactory lessons. In these lessons, students tend to be passive and some lose interest when learning does not challenge them or make use of what they know

already. Assessment is used satisfactorily to inform teachers' planning and to help students make progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. Its impact on improving students' performance is at an early stage but is particularly obvious in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). There are appropriate courses responding to the needs of students of all abilities. These include work leading to vocational qualifications and specific courses on developing students' basic literacy and numeracy, as well as skills for learning. The provision for enrichment activities, particularly in sports and performing arts, is good and uses a wide range of external links; it does much to foster students' personal development. Arrangements for the teaching of personal, social and health education are sound and Key Stage 4 students follow an accredited course in citizenship. In Key Stages 3 and 4, religious education and sex education are in place but this is not fully the case in the sixth form. ICT is well used across the curriculum and the college is beginning to develop its website to give students greater access to teaching materials from home.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are good. The school's arrangements for child protection, the safeguarding of students and risk assessments are in place and reviewed regularly. Support for vulnerable students, including looked-after children, and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is sensitive and effective. The school works well with other agencies to ensure that students and their families receive support when necessary. Thorough induction procedures enable Year 9 students to settle quickly. Students receive good guidance and support when making subject and career choices. In the main school, students' progress is monitored well, and effective action is taken when additional support is needed. Students are set challenging targets to encourage them to reach their full potential. Reports for parents are clear and informative about students' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational and her clarity of vision is ensuring that all staff are fully focused on raising attainment and improving behaviour. She is well supported by hard working senior managers, particularly in monitoring the work of students to help them reach the aspirational targets the school sets for them. Senior leaders and governors have an increasingly clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are aware that examination results have not been good enough and the action they have taken is now leading to much improved standards and satisfactory student achievement. The school recognises some inconsistencies in the effectiveness of middle

managers. Their roles are now being developed further as part of the school's relentless focus on raising achievement but the impact of this work has yet to be fully felt. The school has forged good partnerships with feeder schools and external agencies which both enrich the curriculum and enhance the care and support given to students.

Governors know the school well and are committed to its improvement. Finances are well managed and the school provides satisfactory value for money. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Under the dynamic leadership of the new headteacher most students, parents and staff are optimistic about the college's future and it is satisfactorily placed to improve further.

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

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 disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	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 the learners' needs?	3	3
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?	2	3

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Blyth Community College, Northumberland, NE24 4JP

Thank you for the warm welcome and help you gave us when we visited your school. We particularly appreciated hearing the views of those of you who spent time talking with us about your school. We were impressed with your positive attitudes and wish you every success in your future work.

What we have said about your school in the inspection report:

- Yours is a satisfactory and improving school
- The care, guidance and support you are given are good.
- You reach standards in your work which are below average but your achievement is satisfactory.
- The leadership of your headteacher is dynamic and inspirational, and she is well supported by hardworking staff.
- Teaching and learning, the curriculum you study and your personal development are all satisfactory.

Your school is going to take action to:

- Improve Year 11 GCSE examination results.
- Continue to make strenuous efforts to improve attendance.
- Increase the proportion of good lessons by using more varied and challenging methods of teaching and learning.
- In the sixth form, improve procedures for setting targets and tracking students' progress towards them.

You can help your school improve further by attending regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

With best wishes for the future

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector