

Marsden Heights Community College

Edge End Lane, Nelson, Lancashire, BB9 0PR

Inspection dates

23–24 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, well supported by leaders and governors, has pursued improvement relentlessly since the previous inspection. Leaders have galvanised staff into a strong team that pursues common goals in the best interests of students' well-being and achievement. As a result, teaching, students' academic progress and attendance have all improved.
- Regular checks on the effectiveness of teaching by senior leaders and others with responsibilities have led to well-planned training programmes linked to the college's priorities and the needs of individual staff. Consequently, teaching is good and helps students to make good progress.
- Relationships between staff and students are positive and supportive. Students are keen to learn and do well and respond well to the high expectations set out by teachers and the college.
- Most students enjoy college life and behaviour is good. They feel safe and secure because they are looked after very well. Students who face difficulties in their lives are particularly well cared for and supported. Rates of attendance are above average.
- The college is a calm place where students from a wide range of backgrounds work and socialise together very well indeed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' results in English and mathematics GCSE examinations, although improving, are below national averages.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding, so that students' progress is good rather than outstanding. Some features of teaching are too variable between lessons.
- The ways that some leaders check on the quality of teaching focuses too much on what teachers do and does not take enough account of the effect of teaching on students' learning and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Thirty-two lessons were visited by inspectors. Three of these visits were carried out jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with a group of governors, staff and groups of students from each year. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents provided by the college, including a summary of its self-evaluation.
- Parents' views were sought through surveys carried out by the college over the past year and the 15 responses to the Ofsted on-line survey, Parent View, that were available at the end of the first day of inspection. In addition, inspectors talked to a small number of parents taking part in the 'Mum to Mum' session, a time the college has arranged for parents to get together socially and find out more about the college and the education it is providing.

Inspection team

Gillian Salter-Smith, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector
Clarice Nelson-Rowe	Additional Inspector
Jonathan Woodyatt	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The college is smaller than an average secondary school.
- The number of boys compared to girls is greater than in most secondary schools.
- Of the disabled students and those with special educational needs, the proportion supported through school action is average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or supported through school action plus is above average. The proportion of students receiving additional government funding through the 'pupil premium' is well above average.
- A well-above-average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of these students are of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is high.
- The number of students joining or leaving the college during a key stage is higher than in most schools. A very small number of students are educated off-site through the local authority alternative complementary educational and residential services (ACERS) and at Nelson and Colne College.
- The headteacher of the college supports other local schools through his attachment to the local authority monitoring and intervention team.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for progress and attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve standards in English and mathematics so that, results in Year 11 examinations are close to, or exceed, the national averages by:
 - improving students' speaking skills so that they are more confident and able to discuss their work with each other
 - finding ways for students to use their mathematical skills, knowledge and understanding in more meaningful, real-life situations so that they understand the relevance of mathematics to their lives.
- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding and helps to accelerate students' progress further by:
 - making sure that teachers match tasks and the pace of learning to students' different abilities in all lessons, so that less-able students gain confidence and more-able students are fully stretched in every lesson
 - giving students chances in more lessons to discuss their work with each other, so that they share ideas, express opinions and respond to the views of others more confidently
 - making sure teachers' marking always gives clear guidance to students on how to improve
 - improving students' abilities and confidence to work on their own through developing their own ideas and lines of enquiry
 - making sure that all leaders look for the impact teaching has on students' learning and progress when they check on the quality of lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress in response to good teaching and programmes that meet their needs. The college has improved students' literacy and communication skills from weak starting points in these areas. An extensive programme to improve the reading skills for students in Key Stage 3 has helped accelerate progress and enjoyment of reading. Improvements in students' writing skills are a priority in all subjects. Some students lack confidence when talking about their work with each other and teachers.
- Students' progress and standards by Year 11 have improved since the previous inspection. The college sets high aspirations and has exceeded challenging targets consistently over the past three years.
- In 2011, the proportion of students gaining five or more A to C passes at GCSE was average. The proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes including English and mathematics was below average because standards in English and mathematics were below average. However, progress in these subjects was good.
- In 2012, unvalidated results for Year 11 students show a further improvement in progress and standards, in mathematics especially. The college recognised that a group of White British girls was in danger of underperforming in mathematics. Additional support was very effective in helping these students to achieve well.
- Opportunities to enter examinations early, for example in mathematics, are well managed and more-able students are not disadvantaged by this. In 2012, the proportion of students reaching the highest grades, A*/A, has improved, including in mathematics, reflecting the good progress made by more-able students.
- Pakistani boys achieve particularly well and students from other minority ethnic backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language make good progress.
- Additional government funding is used effectively to provide extra staffing that is well targeted to supporting students at risk of underperforming. As a result, students known to be eligible for free school meals, although still behind the standards for all students in the college are improving year-on-year and the gap is closing. They make better progress between Year 7 and 11 than all students nationally in English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress because their needs are identified quickly and support is matched closely to individual need.
- Students who join the college mid key stage, many of whom speak English as an additional language, make good progress. The school secures equality of opportunity well.

The quality of teaching is good

- Since the previous inspection the college has improved the impact of teaching on students' progress and teaching is now good, but there are some inconsistencies so progress is not outstanding.
- Most lessons are well-structured to a common planning format so students are clear about what they are trying to achieve in relation to examination criteria and their personal targets. Students' frequent involvement in assessing their own work increases their aspirations and confidence. Teachers' expectations of students are usually high and the pace of learning good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are supportive and behaviour is well managed so that disruptions to learning are rare.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the subjects they teach and can explain difficult concepts well and use probing questioning well to deepen students' knowledge and understanding.
- Staff make frequent checks on the progress that all students make. They quickly identify where

individuals or groups of students are falling behind and provide effective extra support to help them to catch up.

- In a few lessons, staff do not plan carefully enough so that tasks are well matched to students' different needs. Sometimes tasks are too hard and not broken down into simple enough steps so that some less-able students feel overwhelmed by difficult tasks that they do not understand. In a small number of lessons, more-able students do not tackle more difficult work quickly enough and spend too much time completing simple tasks.
- In many lessons students improve their communication skills through discussing their work with partners. In a few lessons, opportunities to debate and discuss issues, ideas and opinions with each other and to work on their own in developing lines of enquiry to develop their self-confidence are more limited.
- Although the marking of students' work by some teachers is very helpful and clear in setting out what students should do to improve, this is not yet consistently good across and within subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most students behave well and are keen to learn. Their conduct around the college is calm and orderly. They respond well to the positive climate created within the college of respect and high expectations.
- Students from a wide range of backgrounds work well together in lessons. They concentrate well and cooperate well when working in pairs.
- Students feel safe in college and say bullying is rare. They are aware of different types of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Students say they are confident that staff are there to support them and will sort out any problems that arise quickly.
- Students are aware of how to keep themselves safe in many different circumstances, including when using modern technology.
- Attendance is above average and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The college has worked effectively with individuals and their families to improve attendance. It has been rigorous in discouraging requests for extended leave.
- Permanent exclusions are below average and have reduced in recent years. Fixed-period exclusions have reduced over time and have been used appropriately to manage serious incidents of misbehaviour.
- The college has strong and effective systems to promote positive behaviour and attitudes. Support for those students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable are very effective. Case studies of individuals demonstrate the positive impact this support has on helping students to settle into college life and learn to manage their own behaviour.

The leadership and management are good

- The head teacher, senior leaders and governors set high expectations for themselves, staff and students. The strong collective drive for improvement is effective.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are well managed. Close scrutiny of students' academic progress and rigorous checks on teaching make sure that training for teachers and other staff is linked to the most important priorities for the college and to individual staff needs. Expertise in teaching within the college is used well to improve teaching through sharing the best ways of doing things among staff. Increasingly, in-service training of teachers and other staff is led by college staff rather than by experts brought in from outside the school. There are many examples of improved teaching since the previous inspection that result in students' better progress.
- Faculty and subject leaders have developed their roles well since the previous inspection. They are much better at checking on students' progress and on the quality of teaching in lessons. . .

However, they do not always make the link between how much difference teaching makes to students' learning and progress.

- Strong systems of accountability ensure that staff are held responsible for the quality of their work and the progress of students. Performance management arrangements take full account of the Teachers' Standards and senior leaders are rigorous in setting high expectations in moving staff through the salary scales.
 - The curriculum is well planned and meets students' different needs well. More-able students are catered for well, as is seen in the increasing numbers of students gaining the higher A* to A grades at GCSE. A good balance of academic and vocational courses meets the needs of students in Key Stage 4. Well-planned programmes of personal, social and health education support students' good personal development. The development of reading and writing is well planned. There are not enough opportunities for students to apply their mathematical skills in meaningful, practical situations, so that some students do not always see the relevance of these skills to their lives.
 - The very small number of students following alternative provision are looked after very effectively. Their progress is monitored closely and much individual guidance and support is given to encourage students to maintain interest and progression in education and training. As a result, the vast majority of students move on to education, training or employment at the age of 16.
 - The local authority supports the college well. The general adviser works effectively with senior leaders to identify and provide support. Specific support and training for improving attendance, behaviour and the role of middle leaders have been effective.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors bring a good range of expertise to the college and have been very effective in managing the budget and achieving solvency. They are well informed of the performance of students through regular updates on students' success in national examinations and the progress of students currently in the college. They hold the headteacher closely to account and are aware of the performance of staff and of salary progression and promotion issues through reports from senior staff. Governors are involved in self-evaluation and reviewing improvement plans and some have direct links to subject leaders. However, not all governors monitor the work of the college first hand although the number doing so is increasing. Governors are aware of the pupil premium funding but have not looked carefully at the impact it has had. Governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements fulfil government requirements.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	134990
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	406580

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	764
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ed Saville
Headteacher	Mike Tull
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2011
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