

Marsden Heights Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134990
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	300440
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty HMI

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 on roll	
School	996
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rvd Ed Saville
Headteacher	Mr Mike Tull
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Elland Road Brierfield Nelson Lancashire BB9 5RX
Telephone number	0844 412 7383
Fax number	01282 616330

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Marsden Heights Community College was formed in September 2006 from the amalgamation of two secondary schools. The school is situated on two sites and the new purpose built school is due to be completed in April 2010. The Elland Road site houses Year 7, 8 and 9 and the Hibson Road site Year 10 and 11. The school currently has about 996 students who are mainly from the areas of Brierfield and Nelson; two towns high in the multi-deprivation index with some areas categorised as within 1% of the most deprived nationally. About 58% of students are of Asian Pakistani heritage. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is significantly above the national average. The percentage of students with SEN (including statements) is below the national average. Attainment on entry is well below the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Marsden Heights Community College opened as a result of the amalgamation of two schools with different traditions and community characteristics. The amalgamation at first was fraught with difficulties. Student integration to the new school was slow and this resulted in much poor behaviour. Staffing turbulence had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning and ultimately on student achievement and progress. Year 11 students were following two different curriculum models and the general continuity of education was disrupted. With strong leadership by the new headteacher and a restructured and supportive senior leadership team these shortcomings have been tackled over the last twelve months. This is now a satisfactory and improving school.

There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that improvement strategies are having an impact on achievement and standards. The standards of student work examined by inspectors were at least satisfactory. Tests and modular results indicate significant improvements in performance particularly in English, mathematics and science. Standards and achievement are now satisfactory overall. Managers at all levels recognise the imperative to maintain and further promote these improvements. The school recognises that boys need to achieve higher standards particularly in literacy and numeracy. Students make satisfactory progress in their personal development and enjoy school. Behaviour in lessons and around the site is generally satisfactory. A Year 9 student summed up the transformation: 'This is a different place now than it was at the start, behaviour has improved and teachers do more for you.' Attendance and punctuality has improved. Staffing stability has been achieved. Teaching is satisfactory and improving through an effective programme of staff development and external consultation. The school recognises that the currently satisfactory teaching needs to become more varied and lively through the effective sharing of good practice. The marking of students' work is not consistent, frequent or rigorous enough to help them all to improve. The curriculum is beginning to match the interests and needs of students. The vocational and alternative provision is improving. Good links have been established with post-16 providers which have enriched student opportunities. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some good aspects.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. The monitoring and tracking of student progress has been strengthened. The headteacher is laying firm foundations for the future and giving the school increased capacity to improve further. Senior leaders and middle managers share a strong commitment to continuing improvement. New and systematic quality assurance systems have improved tracking and monitoring procedures; students now know their targets and how to achieve them. Intervention strategies to tackle underachievement are in place and are beginning to have an impact. Managers, staff and students have far greater confidence in the direction and future of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in both key stages.
- Improve boys' achievement, especially in English and mathematics.
- Share good practice more effectively to raise the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that marking in all subjects gives a clear indication to pupils about how to improve.

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

Students enter the school with well below national average standards, especially in literacy. It is not possible to identify trends over several years as the school has only one set of test and examination results. The school rightly categorises results in 2007 as inadequate. 2007 test results show that the rate of progress between Years 7 to 9 were below average with significant underachievement in mathematics and science. Students made significant progress in English. There is evidence that initiatives to tackle underachievement are having an impact. In lessons visited in Years 7 to 9 inspectors judged that students made at least satisfactory progress. The quality of work in students' books and engagement in lessons was at least satisfactory and in some cases good. Tracking of students' progress and tests in Year 7 and 8 indicate significant improvement notably in mathematics and science.

In Years 10 and 11 in 2007, students achieved significantly below the national averages of 5 A*–C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The standards of student work examined in Years 10 and 11 by inspectors were at least satisfactory. In lessons visited, inspectors judged that students made at least satisfactory progress. The school's very systematic tracking of students demonstrates that there is at least satisfactory progress particularly in English, mathematics and science and that students are on course to meet the challenging targets set for 2008. Modules already taken in Year 11 indicate a marked increase in performance in mathematics and science. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same progress as others. Inspectors observed good standards of work in English, mathematics, science, physical education, design and technology and information communication technology. The school recognises that boys need to achieve higher standards particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students' personal development is good where they are provided with specific support for their needs, such as through the house system or in the Student Progress Centre. Attendance is in line with similar schools and has shown distinct improvement in recent months. Punctuality to lessons is generally good and well monitored by staff. Students' behaviour is satisfactory: they have started to develop a sense of being part of the new school community. Older students now rarely refer to the two previous schools they used to attend. Students from different backgrounds and communities get on well together. Students usually behave well in lessons although they are less enthusiastic when required to engage in independent work. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school offers an increasing range of opportunities for students to develop an awareness of the wider society and strengthen their own aspirations for the future. Students adopt safe practices in classes and outside. They move around corridors in an orderly manner and follow safety instructions carefully in practical lessons. Students have a satisfactory understanding of healthy lifestyles. A well structured programme of citizenship is helping them to gain a better understanding of their responsibilities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with examples of good teaching. Monitoring within the school shows that the number of good lessons is increasing, and this judgement was corroborated during the inspection. Schemes of work are now well planned to support teaching and to ensure progressive development of students' skills. A programme of professional development is in place within the school to improve teaching and learning. The impact of this is shown by, for example, the increased use of peer assessment, where students are given clear criteria and then apply these when reviewing each other's work. The best lessons are well structured, with a clear sense of purpose and a variety of activities which engage students of differing abilities and sustain their interest. Students know their target grades and are keen to achieve these, especially in examination classes where motivation is high. For example, in a mathematics lesson students were highly focused on the theory, practice and interpretation of moving average graphs. They were able to explore the use of these graphs through Internet links with the London Stock Exchange and observe how theory was practiced within commercial companies. In some lessons, however, there is insufficient challenge and opportunities to promote learning are lost. Lesson objectives are sometimes too general. Although pupils have regular assessments, they are not always given clear advice on what they need to do to improve. The use of interactive technology across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and meets all statutory requirements. The school provides an expanding range of vocational courses which are well suited to students' needs. There are effective links with local further education providers, where some of the courses on offer take place. Careful guidance is given on options, and this is appreciated by the students and their parents. Students also have the opportunity to participate in work experience, choosing from a wide range of settings. The school works hard to widen students' horizons, with speakers on a range of careers and visits to universities. A variety of clubs and extra-curricular activities are offered, particularly in sport and drama. Recently the school reached the regional final of the English Speaking Union debating competition and those students involved spoke eloquently of how the experience and success had improved their confidence and aspirations. An innovative approach to the curriculum is shown, for example, by the cross-curricular Holocaust project. The school aims to meet individual needs as necessary. One student who had joined the school with little English said she felt 'safe and well-supported'. Literacy is recognised as a challenge for many students entering the school, so additional sessions are provided to develop these skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Many aspects are good. The house system and the Student Progress Centre in particular provide good support. Students in Year 7 benefit from a thorough programme of induction. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support to enable them to access learning. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure students from different backgrounds have full access to all opportunities. The level

of exclusions has been reduced as a result of support and the development of alternative curriculum arrangements. Comprehensive careers education is increasing the motivation of students in Years 10 and 11 and encouraging progression to post-16 education. Health and safety requirements are fully in place. The checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are carried out thoroughly. Child protection procedures are reliable and staff demonstrate a good knowledge of how to respond to any concerns raised. The school is making extensive use of a system for tracking students' progress. Its benefits are now well understood by staff and it is being increasingly used in discussions with students about their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher and senior leadership team are providing good and effective leadership in steering the school in the right direction during an unsettled period. In particular, the headteacher's strongly articulated vision for the school is now shared by leaders throughout the school, resulting in a common sense of purpose. A collegiate leadership has been established. There is a clear sense of teamwork among all managers in focusing on an improvement agenda. The day-to-day running of the school on its two sites has been managed well, despite the poor condition of much of the accommodation. Middle management is improving and those at that level have a realistic understanding of the school's strengthening and areas for improvement.

The school has a broadly accurate picture of its overall performance and has established a thorough process for self-evaluation. Poor examination results in 2007 have been tackled through the introduction and application of new quality systems and tracking procedures. Whilst the impact of these systems has yet to be fully realised, a clear focus on teaching and learning and pupil target setting has been established. The school recognises that further improvement is required so that students make better progress and the percentage of good teaching is increased. A robust evaluation of the effectiveness of individual curriculum areas has recently been introduced. A developing programme of innovative links with outside agencies is contributing to students' self-confidence and self-esteem.

Governors have an accurate picture of the school's performance. They work in close partnership with the school and provide appropriate challenge and support. The school provides satisfactory capacity for further improvement and satisfactory value for money.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
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
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

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
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

14 March 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Marsden Heights Community College, Lancashire, BB9 5RX.

Thank you for your warm welcome to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed our two days at your school. We particularly enjoyed talking to so many of you about your work, interests and how much you enjoy and give to the school.

Your school is now making satisfactory progress. Your headteacher provides strong leadership. The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard because they want you to do the very best you can.

Achievement and standards have been poor but are now beginning to improve. We found on our visit that they were satisfactory. You demonstrate enjoyment in your lessons, particularly when you know that you are improving and learning. We would encourage you to continue along this path of improvement. You can play an important part in this by working with your teachers and helping them to improve your work even further.

Teaching and learning is improving. In the better lessons you respond well to the teachers' high expectations and you make good progress. However in a number of lessons you are not being given work which actively engages you in learning.

Your curriculum options are satisfactory and improving. They are beginning to serve your abilities and offer you a wider range of opportunities for the future. You enjoy an improving range of extra activities. The teachers and support staff care for you and give you satisfactory care and guidance.

Your school needs to:

- ensure that improvements in the standards and achievements that you have made are continued and lead to better examination results
- improve the progress of boys, especially in English and mathematics
- share good practice more effectively to raise the quality of teaching and learning
- improve consistency of marking and detailed feedback to you so that you know best how to improve.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you well for your future education.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector