

Northallerton College

Grammar School Lane , Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL6 1DD

Inspection dates 20–21 November 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In Key Stage 4, too few students exceed what is expected of them especially in mathematics, because too much teaching requires improvement. As a result achievement and attainment are not high enough.
- The most-able students in mathematics do not consistently achieve well. Consequently, not all reach the standards of which they are capable.
- The level of challenge in tasks is not well matched to students' abilities and needs. Lessons often lack that essential spark to motivate students to work things out for themselves.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good.
- Despite resolute efforts, the attainment gap between those students supported by extra funding and their classmates is not closing fast enough.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is not providing a relentless enough focus on raising students' achievement rapidly, regardless of their starting points.
- Subject leadership is not providing a strong enough push to improve teaching and speed up students' progress.
- Senior leaders do not ensure that the impact of the actions they take to improve college performance is checked rigorously enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The proportion of students achieving A* and A grades in GCSE English rose significantly in recent examinations.
- The good teaching in the sixth form is raising achievement and attainment quickly.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is good, relaxed and sensible at social times. Students follow the rules well and show respect for each other.
- The executive headteacher and the well led governing body have an excellent strategic vision and high ambitions for the quality of secondary education for local students.
- The college provides an interesting curriculum which develops students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons including six paired observations and paired work scrutiny with the senior and subject leaders. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and learning walks around the college to in order to check the quality of what is provided for students.
- Inspectors held discussions with students, parents, five members of the governing body, school staff, including those with responsibilities for subjects, and the local authority area adviser.
- Inspectors took account of the 92 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and examined a range of documentation including the school's own records of students' current progress, records from the observation of lessons, students' books and school-improvement planning. They also considered documentation in relation to behaviour, attendance, child protection and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Alexandra Hook	Additional Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector
Graeme Clarke	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school which has specialist technology status.
- The college is part of the Northallerton and Catterick Federation consisting of Risedale Sports and Community College and Allertonshire School. All schools share the same executive headteacher and governing body. Each school has its own associate headteacher.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- Currently, a well-below average proportion of students are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and children from service families.
- Almost all students are from White British communities with a very few pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. No students are entered early for GCSE examinations.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make certain that more teaching is inspiring and thought-provoking, especially in mathematics, to ensure that all students' progress is rapid and achievement high by:
 - raising expectations of what students of all abilities can achieve and ensuring that high-quality layout, literacy and extended working are continuously promoted in all students' work
 - sharing teachers' thought-provoking methods widely across the college to encourage students to think critically, analyse problems, speculate, make deductions and justify their solutions
 - planning lesson activities that are closely matched to an accurate assessment of students' abilities, needs and talents to get the most out of all students in each lesson
 - using a wider range of high-quality questioning, carefully tailored to individual abilities, to relentlessly check and test students' thinking, knowledge and understanding
 - making certain that teachers keep explanations brief and sharply focused so that students have plenty of time to complete their activities independently or collaboratively
 - ensuring all students are provided with well-defined written feedback for improvement in their books to boost the drive to raise achievement and standards
 - maximising the opportunities for students to practice their mathematical skills in all subjects.
- Increase the impact of senior leaders and managers, especially on driving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - making certain that actions taken by senior leaders to accelerate students' progress and raise achievement are rigorously checked, so that judgements of college performance are fully accurate
 - making sure that subject leaders receive high quality training and support to enable them to monitor effectively the performance of their subject areas, hold staff to account in positive ways and improve outcomes for students
 - sharpening the quality of lesson observations to make sure that teachers receive accurate feedback and the college's improvement planning is more effectively informed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Overall attainment, including that of the most-able students, slipped in 2013 GCSE examinations to broadly average levels largely as a result of the fall in numbers of students gaining five A* to C grades in mathematics. Consequently, too few students in mathematics achieved expected progress and not enough of the most able reached higher grades. Tasks in mathematics lessons are not always closely enough matched to individual students' abilities. As a result there is inconsistent challenge and pace in lessons to promote rapid progress and achievement.
- By contrast, concerted action in English led to a higher proportion than found nationally exceeding the progress expected of them in recent examinations. The proportion gaining A* and A grades was also high compared to the average. Current college information, confirmed by inspection evidence, shows that progress rates and achievement in English in Years 10 and 11 are being sustained, with similar patterns in science subjects. Positive college action has led to a recovery in mathematics, with progress rates accelerating. Current Year 11 students are on course to achieve at least the standards expected of them.
- A recent drive to ensure all students achieve equally well has led to more carefully target use of pupil premium funding. This is helping to close the gap in attainment between those supported by the funding and their classmates at a faster rate. In the 2013 examinations, attainment gaps for those eligible for the funding were three terms behind other college students in English and mathematics. More effective programmes of intervention and classroom support are paying dividends. Current progress information for current Year 11 students, points to an attainment gap which is narrowing significantly.
- An enjoyment of reading is being fostered well, with sixth-form students providing excellent role models in paired work with less confident readers. Nevertheless, opportunities are sometimes missed to embed the use of literacy and numeracy in other subjects; for example, by ensuring that students are given every opportunity to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. Recent improvements in intervention and support are ensuring that what students need to learn next is pinpointed accurately and acted upon. Consequently, students' rate of progress is gathering speed and patterns of improvement are more consistent.
- The attainment and achievement of sixth-form students is improving steadily, especially in Year 12. The broad range of subjects and well-defined pathways are a good match to students' aspirations and needs. Consequently, students are keen and committed.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving with almost all inadequate teaching eliminated since the previous inspection. Whilst close to half of the teaching seen in Key Stage 4 was good, none was outstanding. Too many lessons require improvement. Consequently, teaching is not always strong enough to secure a consistent pattern of rapid progress and high achievement.
- Teaching in mathematics is uneven in its quality, although there are currently positive signs of improvement as the result of specialist training sessions. Despite good subject knowledge, expectations and demands of students are sometimes too variable and methods adopted insufficiently thought-provoking. At times, work is either too easy or too hard.
- In lessons when progress is fastest and achievement highest, teachers:
 - plan activities that are tailored to individual needs and abilities and reflect high expectations of what each student can achieve
 - use methods that are thought-provoking and require students to think and work things out for themselves
 - mark students' work regularly and assess work accurately against agreed standards

- use students' progress information effectively to obtain a clear idea of what students need to do to improve.
- In lessons which lack sufficient challenge and pace and which require improvement:
 - expectations of what students of all starting points can achieve are not high enough
 - students are too dependent on the teacher or support assistant and methods lack that essential spark to capture and hold students' interest
 - questioning fails to check knowledge and understanding enough or provoke sufficient thinking
 - written feedback in books does not provide concise steps for further improvement.
- When achievement is highest, such as in a Year 10 science lesson, students were observed working cooperatively for extended periods of time, solving energy-transfer problems with their thinking being constantly checked and tested. Well-timed questioning and support maintained the momentum of good progress. Good teaching in Years 12 and 13 encourages students to manage their work well.
- In other lessons observed, teachers adopt a 'one size fits all' approach and talk for too long rather than encouraging students to think for themselves, analysing problems and explaining their solutions. As a result students sometimes become restless and lose interest.
- Although most work is marked regularly practice varies across subject areas. When good practice is embedded, such as in English, students are well aware of how well they are doing and how to improve. Too much work is incomplete, too short, requests for corrections not responded to and layout and presentation lacking accuracy, order and refinement. Opportunities are also missed to practise and extend students' mathematical skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good. The atmosphere in social areas is relaxed and friendly. Students are considerate and polite. They report that they feel safe and enjoy college life. Improved attendance is a little above average and persistent absence lower than average. Exclusions have been reduced since the previous inspection.
- The positive college ethos underpins the clear boundaries that are set for students' conduct. Good care and support is established in clear, well-understood systems. Students respond confidently to the positive role models and skilled management that staff provide.
- Students are well informed about how they can keep themselves safe. They are taught how to assess and manage risk themselves in assemblies, tutor time and practical lessons. For example, the Drive Alive focus day for Year 12 students successfully increases their awareness of the risks that teenage drivers face.
- Behaviour in lessons is usually good and has improved since the previous inspection. In lessons when teaching is good or better, students display ambition and a determination to succeed. In a few lessons when concentration drifts a little it is usually because work is not interesting enough or pitched at the right level. At social times students manage their own behaviour well moving about safely and sensibly across the large site.
- Students are well-informed about bullying in all of its forms. They report that any bullying is dealt with promptly by staff. This includes inappropriate use of new technology. Older students thrive on the responsibilities that they are given, such as supporting younger students.
- Students in the sixth form speak really positively about the quality of support and guidance that they receive. This enables them to successfully plan for the future. A broad range of enrichment activities, including preparation and visits to prepare students for university entrance, helps to raise their aspirations and widen their horizons.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The executive headteacher and senior leaders have an accurate view of college strengths and weaknesses. They have been effective in improving significant aspects of the college's work, but

are not always sharply enough focused on measuring the impact of actions taken to speed up students' progress. Sometimes improvements to increase the rate of students' progress and levels of achievement have been too drawn-out and inconsistent in their effectiveness.

- The quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, outcomes in GCSE and GCE examinations, behaviour, attendance and performance management rigour have all improved. These improvements reveal the college's capacity for further and sustained improvement. Since September, there are clear signs that the rate of college improvement is quickening and that inconsistencies are being ironed out.
- The strengths in teacher's subject knowledge and the effective practice that exists are not always shared widely enough to strengthen weaker subject areas. Subject leaders display high levels of commitment, but some leaders lack the essential sharpness required to judge the quality of subject performance precisely. Consequently, this hinders the drive to secure rapid progress and high achievement in a few areas.
- Positive action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching. Effective use has been made of specialist support, including from the local authority, to add to teachers' skills, such as in mathematics. Nevertheless, the leadership of teaching and learning does not provide a relentless enough focus on raising achievement in all lessons to enable the college to improve.
- Students' progress is checked frequently and systematically. However, not all subject teachers assess accurately enough. Although equal opportunities are promoted positively and improvements are evident in most subject areas, the improvements that have been brought about to ensure that all different groups of students achieve equally well are uneven. This includes those supported by pupil premium funding.
- The curriculum has been modified to take more account of students' abilities, needs and aspirations. For example, the college is increasingly successful in ensuring that all students progress to education, training and employment at the end of Year 11. The effectiveness of the sixth-form provision has been enhanced by a similar broadening of opportunities and improvements in Year 12.
- The management of teachers' performance is firmly embedded and rigorous. It links students' progress securely to incentives and rewards and is increasingly effective in holding teachers to account for their classroom performance.
- The local authority has an accurate view of college performance. Partnership working is a strength and this includes a close working relationship with both the local authority specialists and the partner schools in the federation to bring about improvement. The engagement of parents is increasingly positive.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, with much best practice underpinning the good quality of care and support provided for students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a crystal clear vision for seamless secondary provision in the town. They are highly committed and supportive. They have provided good support to enable the college to improve, such as when restructuring staff responsibilities. Using performance information increasingly consistently, the governing body has a firm grasp of strengths and priorities for improvement, although their expertise is sometimes underused in holding teachers to account for students' outcomes. This includes the use of pupil premium funding. They have used local authority resources and support effectively, such as when expanding the federation. They manage performance appraisal well and ensure safeguarding systems are monitored effectively.

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	121710
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	425896

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	14–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rob Barker
Headteacher	Steve Merifield
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2012
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