

NCHS The Science College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124413
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380888
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2012
Lead inspector	Frank Knowles

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	440
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Porter
Headteacher	Mark Heuston (Executive Headteacher), Jill Adamson (Associate Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Frank Knowles	Additional inspector
Patrick Taylor	Additional inspector
Linda Austin	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 27 lessons taught by 27 teachers, made short visits to other lessons and tutor groups, listened to younger students reading and looked at a range of students' work. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents covering students' attainment and progress, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. The inspection team took account of the responses to inspection questionnaires from a sample of 134 students, and from 42 staff and 91 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The balance of boys and girls varies considerably depending on the year group. A much higher proportion of students than the national average is known to be eligible for free school meals. Nearly all students come from White British backgrounds, with very small numbers from a range of other heritages. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.

The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. It is a specialist science college and, in February 2010, formed the South Newcastle Federation with Clayton Hall Business and Language College. The federation has a single governing body, one executive headteacher for both schools, and two associate headteachers, one for each school.

The nursery and before- and after-school club on the college's site are privately managed and inspected separately.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Improved and rigorous leadership since becoming part of the South Newcastle Federation has brought about rapid improvements in teaching, behaviour and standards. Students value the support they receive from their teachers. It is not yet an outstanding school because inconsistencies in teaching mean that students' progress is not always as fast as it could be.
- Good progress and rapidly improving standards mean that students' achievement is good. They reach broadly average attainment in Year 11 from low starting points in Year 7, particularly in literacy. Standards in mathematics and the English Baccalaureate are above the national average. Improvements in teaching mean students are on track to achieve better results in 2012.
- Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and students participate enthusiastically in classroom activities, especially where they provide high levels of challenge. In many lessons, teachers use creative strategies to maximise students' understanding, and marking helps students to improve their work. Not all teaching provides enough challenge or opportunities for extended discussion, despite recent improvements, and this slows students' progress.
- Students are courteous and behave well around the school. In lessons, behaviour is generally good, and students contribute fully when tasks provide interest and challenge. Occasional off-task behaviour where teaching does not motivate students is dealt with consistently well. Older students note how behaviour has improved in the last two years. Students say bullying is unusual, and that staff deal with it swiftly and confidentially.
- High expectations, careful monitoring and the full involvement of middle leaders mean that the school has a clear view of its performance, its strengths and areas for improvement. Its strategic and operational plans are clear and relevant. Leaders maintain a strong drive to improve teaching, although observations focus more on teaching than its impact on learning.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching so that more is good or better by:
 - setting higher levels of challenge in lessons, while continuing support for lower-attaining students to achieve the learning objectives
 - developing students' speaking and listening skills through questioning and other activities that demand extended oral contributions
 - achieving greater consistency of marking so that all students know what they need to do to improve their work
 - ensuring the teaching of reading brings about rapid improvement in the reading ages of those students who arrive with significant weaknesses in literacy.

- Sharpen the school's evaluation of teaching and learning by:
 - placing greater emphasis on students' learning during observations
 - fine tuning the analysis of progress made by groups of students to identify quickly areas for improvement and outstanding practice that can be shared.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Over the last three years, standards have been rising at a faster rate than nationally, and the school's data indicate that students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve even higher results this year. There is some variation between subjects, however. The school has closed the gap between students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students in mathematics and English, but not yet in all other subjects. The school's operational plans have well-thought-out strategies in place to reduce gender differences in attainment.

Students are making increasingly better progress. The school's data indicate that progress is faster this year in GCSE and other courses in Years 10 and 11, and is now good. Students work towards challenging GCSE target grades, although many are not confident learners. Because of this, the school has worked consistently to raise students' expectations, including the use of mentoring. Students' willingness to take part in additional classes in Year 10 and 11 supports their good progress. The school's assessment data indicates that students also make good progress in Years 7 to 9. This good progress is reflected in students' work over the current school year, with some variation between subjects. Almost all parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire felt their children were making good progress.

Students have good attitudes to learning and generally enjoy their lessons. They learn most effectively and make rapid progress when teaching engages them actively in tasks that promote higher-order thinking skills. In a mathematics lesson, for

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example, lower-attaining students in Year 8 made good progress when working in pairs to calculate the value for money of purchases in a supermarket, finding that bigger packs were not always the best value. The school's effective system for tracking the progress of individual students means that staff provide support for those students in Key Stage 4 at risk of not meeting their challenging targets. The school is currently extending this to students in Key Stage 3.

The weakest readers in Years 7 and 8, identified effectively by the school's analysis of students' literacy levels on entry, receive additional support targeted at their individual needs. While they make satisfactory progress, this is not fast enough to prepare them well for independent access to the full curriculum from Year 9 onward. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers through effective in-class support, including with reading.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers and the vast majority of students rightly feel that teaching is good. Students in Year 11 were clear that it had improved in the last few years, particularly in their GCSE courses. Students' work shows well-focused teaching with widespread use of assessment criteria to support learning, particularly in Year 11, leading to good and sustained progress. Teachers' planning includes clear learning objectives, often differentiated to meet the needs of the range of learners in a class. Subject departments include relevant elements of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in teaching. For example, students in Year 7 appreciated the beauty of coasters made in design and technology and, in religious education, students in Year 8 reflected on the qualities of an inspirational leader. There is a strong focus on the appreciation of other cultures in the work undertaken in tutor groups.

The good teaching observed in the inspection led to students making rapid progress, for example in understanding the relationship between fractions and ratios in a mathematics lesson in Year 8 through working in groups on an open-ended task. Students in Year 9 beginning their GCSE course in drama were fully engaged in discussing complex issues of hatred in international contexts and this led to rapid development of performance skills. Assessment of students' work is related strongly to criteria, with some very good use of peer assessment. For example, in a business studies lesson, students in Year 10 assessed each other's work and gave written feedback, with reasons, on the marks achieved. Students then set personal targets for improvement based on their partner's written comments. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported in lessons, including with reading, and teaching assistants focus effectively on gains in knowledge, understanding and skills.

Apart from in mathematics, this good quality of teaching is not consistently in place across or within subjects. Some teaching focused too much on the objective to be achieved by all students and did not challenge most students. Some lessons did not give enough responsibility for students to explore issues orally, and questioning did

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not always draw extended responses from students and accepted single-word answers. Marking is inconsistent, too, with some teachers not giving the full evaluations indicating clearly what students need to do to improve their work that were seen in many books.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's records of behaviour and discussions with older students indicate significant improvement in the last two years, and the school is now a calm and orderly place in which to learn. Behavioural referrals have reduced substantially in the last year, and the few that there are tend to be associated with classrooms where teaching is not consistently good. Teachers are generally very adept at dealing quickly with any moments when students move off-task, so that learning is not interrupted. Through inspection questionnaires, a minority of parents and carers noted their concerns about disruption in lessons, but students and the school's records indicated it is unusual. Students' attitudes to learning are good and they have good relationships with teachers. Behaviour policies are consistently applied. External agencies provide specialist support, for example counselling and from the youth offending team. The school has replaced historic patterns of misbehaviour with an environment in which purposeful learning is the norm and behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school.

Exclusions from school have reduced in the last year and are now half the national average. Attendance and punctuality are improving and attendance this year is average. Students feel safe at school and report that very little bullying of any type takes place. They feel that staff deal with any incidents swiftly and very discreetly, a view also held by their parents and carers. Students are acutely aware of the way social networks can be used for bullying, including by other family members, and recognise the risks of internet use. The school takes internet safety very seriously, with clear guidance and sanctions that are well known by students. The school runs a small nurture group to support younger students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, and this enhances these students' self-esteem so that they feel secure in mainstream classes.

Leadership and management

The governing body has a very good grasp of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. Strategic planning is thorough and staff say they know what the school is trying to achieve. Regular reviews of the school's detailed operational plans are a strong element of the strategic leadership of the school, with clear targets to be met in each element of the plan. The governing body has ensured the school meets all statutory requirements for safeguarding its students. The school tackles any form of discrimination strongly. In these and in many other areas, there are common policies across the federation.

The curriculum promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. It has been revised to provide more flexible and more appropriate

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courses, with some joint groups across the federation, and it now meets students' needs well. Senior leaders focused initially and successfully on the elimination of inadequate teaching but, with improved practice and changes of staff, have now moved to ensuring that the quality of teaching throughout the school is good or better. Regular monitoring of classroom practice, clear observation criteria, detailed feedback and individual action plans for teachers all indicate a concerted and successful drive to raise the quality of teaching further. Teachers have undertaken considerable professional development on teaching and learning in the last two years to support this. Despite focusing more on teaching than its impact on students' learning, observations are rigorous.

Senior leaders have devised an exceptionally rigorous process of data analysis and half-termly meetings to review students' progress with middle leaders. These determine what support and intervention strategies should be used with individual students who are not making sufficient progress. Extensive data analysis identifies patterns in the longer-term attainment and progress of students of different genders, abilities and ethnic backgrounds. Senior leaders do not yet make full use of the data they hold to take account of the interim progress made in different subjects, teaching groups and other definable groups in the school.

The move to become a partner in a federation has brought major benefits to the school. The systems and processes by which the school is led and managed are now rigorous and focused fully on raising achievement. The improvements made in many areas of the school, but particularly in teaching, behaviour and standards, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to sustain further improvement.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



21 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of NCHS The Science College, Newcastle, ST5 2QY

Thank you for the welcome you gave the members of the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed speaking with you in lessons, in discussion groups, when we looked at your work and while hearing some of you read. Your views, including through the inspection questionnaire, were really valuable to us and helped us come to our conclusions. We were particularly pleased to hear you feel safe at school and that you feel well supported by staff.

You go to a good and improving school. You make good progress, particularly in Years 9 to 11, and we agree with you that teaching is good overall. We also agree that teaching in many lessons is better than in others, and we have asked the school to make sure that all teaching matches the quality of the best by teachers always:

- setting work that gives you a challenge and makes you think
- providing opportunities for you to develop your speaking skills in groups and in the whole class
- making sure those of you who need help with reading make rapid improvement in your reading ages
- telling you what you need to do to improve your work when they mark it.

Becoming part of the South Newcastle Federation has brought many improvements to the school, and the school's senior staff are doing a good job in raising standards. We have asked them to make sure they monitor your progress carefully and focus on more on how well you are learning when they observe lessons.

For your part, we hope you will help the school improve attendance and behaviour even further by attending regularly and always doing your best in lessons. We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Knowles
Lead inspector

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