

James Calvert Spence College

South Avenue, Amble, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 0ND

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2014

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		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students, including the most able, do not always achieve the expected rate of progress in Key Stage 2 given their starting points.
- Achievement overall requires improvement because students do not always do as well as they should over a sustained period of time.
- Not all heads of faculty drive improvement to the same high standard.
- Not enough teaching has been consistently good for a sustained period of time. Students' learning is not always checked regularly enough in lessons so work is sometimes too easy or too hard.
- Marking and feedback are not always good enough to support students in improving their work.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive and in a few lessons learning is disrupted.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers, including governors, have a resolute determination to ensure that standards rise quickly.
- Through better checking on lessons by the executive headteacher, the quality of teaching is improving.
- Students feel safe in college. The college provides well for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There is some good teaching and examples of outstanding teaching were seen during the inspection in English and art.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior members of staff including the executive headteacher and one of the two deputy headteachers. In addition, a number of other lessons were visited with the executive headteacher to look at the quality of marking.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 38 responses from parents to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View as well as the results from the school's own survey of parents' views. One written communication and a telephone call from parent were also considered.
- There were 38 staff questionnaires returned and considered by the inspection team.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including examples of students' work, the school's own information on students' attainment and progress, records of attendance and behaviour, and information about safeguarding, school planning and performance management.

Inspection team

Philip Smith, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dr. Prydwen Elfed-Owens

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- James Calvert Spence College - South Avenue is a smaller than average sized middle-deemed-secondary school.
- Students enter the college in Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the performance of students known to be eligible for free school meals, those with a parent in the armed forces and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action or school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is above the national average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are low.
- In 2013, the college did not meet the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The college is federated with its partner college, James Calvert Spence College-Acklington Road. Leaders have responsibility for both federated colleges.
- A small number of students are educated at the pupil referral unit.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good so that students, including the most able, achieve higher standards, by ensuring that:
 - teachers check students' understanding of their work more effectively during lessons to enable teaching to be adjusted to meet students' learning needs
 - teaching assistants and other adults in the classroom are used consistently well to enable the students they support to make faster progress
 - the quality of marking and feedback to students is as consistently good as the best marking found in the college.
- Ensure that the recent improvements in students' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics are built upon securely so that:
 - more students reach expected levels of achievement by the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics
 - a greater proportion of students make and exceed expected levels of progress and are better prepared for the next stages of their education.
- Continue to improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that heads of faculty are equally effective in tackling inconsistencies in teaching and marking
 - making sure that there is appropriate monitoring of students' progress in reading, writing and mathematics when they are educated off-site
 - continue to reduce the levels of persistent absence and exclusions and sustain the recent improvements to attendance
 - further developing the work of governors in evaluating the improvements being made to

teaching so that the weaknesses they have identified are quickly and successfully tackled.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The college's assessment, confirmed by inspectors' analysis of students' work, shows that many students are working at levels below those expected for their age.
- Achievement requires improvement because students, including the most able, do not make good enough progress over time. National test results for the last two years indicate that, by the end of Key Stage 2, students do not perform as well as they could and that while they are closing rapidly now, wide gaps existed between the achievement of those known to be eligible for free school meals and their peers.
- Since the previous inspection students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, have not always made as much progress as they could in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have developed rigorous checks on progress and current assessment information indicates that more students are now making faster progress since September 2013.
- There have been significant improvements this year in students' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Rates of progress in Year 6 are particularly strong. The progress of current students is more rapid and the school's assessment data show standards are beginning to rise.
- Achievement requires improvement because students' progress varies between subjects throughout the school. Students' progress in other subjects including history, geography and modern foreign languages shows that they are not consistently achieving well enough over time.
- It is clear from students' work that improving achievement is related to improvements made in teaching. This year, for the first time, students leaving Year 8 are currently on track to make more rapid rates of progress.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately. A nurture group and a reading programme are used to effectively support students for whom the funding is allocated. Year 7 catch-up funding has also been used well to provide summer school programmes and interventions to improve students' understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent). Current college data show that historically wide gaps in performance between all students and those known to be eligible for free school meals are now starting to close rapidly.
- The breakfast club, open to all students, provides students with a free breakfast and an opportunity to develop their literacy by reading to another adult or older student. Students told inspectors that they valued this and it has helped them improve their confidence and interest in reading more widely.
- The school sport funding has been used effectively in helping to have a specialist physical education teacher who works across a number of schools. It has also been used to provide dance workshops for boys and there has been a positive response by some boys to the after-school dance club.
- A small number of students attend a local pupil referral unit. Leaders regularly receive reports from the unit which highlight improvements to students' behaviour. However, leaders do not do enough to track the rates of progress these students make in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the college varies from outstanding to inadequate. Although teaching has improved since the last inspection, not enough teaching is consistently good or better to enable all students to make good progress and achieve well over a sustained period of time.
- Teachers do not always check on students' learning effectively enough and, as a result, are not always aware that the work set is too easy or too difficult. Consequently, students, including the most able, are not always fully challenged and so do not always make the faster rates of progress of which they are capable.

- Some teaching is good and better. Teachers carefully plan tasks which challenge students of all abilities. For example, in a Year 8 art lesson where students were studying the work of the artist Michael Craig Martin, the teacher had the highest expectations of the students. Through skilled and appropriate questioning, students provided detailed and extended answers, which included very effective use of key vocabulary and technical language. As a result, students made outstanding progress and produced high quality work.
- The quality of marking is improving but there is a need for greater consistency so that all teachers match the best practice which is evident in the college. Teachers usually highlight misspelt keywords and expect students to correct these errors. However, the quality and accuracy of this feedback requires improvement. A review of students' work shows that some teachers do not accurately spell keywords or consistently correct misspelt keywords.
- In some of the most effective marking and feedback, teachers provide students with helpful subject-specific comments and indicate how they could improve their work. Students are then encouraged to respond to the teachers' comments and there are instances of active dialogue developing between the student and the teacher, which focuses on how to improve work.
- Where teaching is good or better, teaching assistants are fully involved and effective in working with an identified group of students. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, the teaching assistant effectively supported a group of lower-ability students to help them analyse a newspaper article, looking at how it was structured and the reasons it was written. As a result, these students made good progress. This positive impact of teaching assistants is not always this evident. Where teaching is less effective, they remain passive for too long and sometimes lack clear direction from the teacher and as a result, opportunities to support learning are overlooked.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because students' attitudes to learning are not consistently making a good or better contribution to their achievement. Some students and parents say that in a few lessons, occasional disruption slows the pace of learning. There is some low-level misbehaviour in lessons when tasks are not well matched to students' abilities.
- Students are keen to learn in most lessons. Students in Year 6 especially, demonstrate good attitudes to learning and this is because of the high quality of teaching that they receive.
- Students get on well with each other. Students are generally well mannered and behave well in and around the school. During break-times there can be some occasional boisterous behaviour in the college canteen but this is dealt with effectively.
- The Progress Zone is based at the high school and is used effectively to support those students with challenging behaviour. As a result of being taught in small groups, students are helped to modify and improve their behaviour. As one student said 'I've learnt a lot and I behave now.'
- Leaders have been effective in tackling the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils. The use of a wider range of measures, including the use of internal isolation in the school's reflection room, has helped pupils to manage their anger before it escalates to a point where exclusions are required.
- Exclusions have fallen and attendance rates for all groups of students have improved considerably this year. There are a good range of rewards for regular attendance, which include trips to the cinema, ice skating and being allowed to go on a college residential.
- Students attend the school regularly and punctually and this is making a significant contribution to recent improvements in achievement. Students are often helpful to visitors and have a sense of pride in themselves and the school.
- All students wear the appropriate uniform and there is little dawdling to lessons. Students have the right equipment for lessons and this means that lessons are able to start promptly and with little time being wasted.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students benefit from visits from the local police and fire brigade to talk about the dangers of fire, road safety and what to do if

they are approached by a stranger. Consequently, students are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

- Bullying does happen on occasion. Incidences of racist or other forms of bullying are rare. Students say they feel confident that they can tell an adult in school if they are picked on by another student and that it will be dealt with.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher, along with other leaders, is developing a culture of high expectations for both staff and students. She is resolute in her determination to see students achieve their best and this aim is shared by other leaders. Leaders recognise that in the past students' progress has not been as good as it should or could have been and detailed and effective plans are in place to support improvement.
- While not yet good, leaders have improved the quality of teaching and the number of good lessons is increasing. This is because leaders are providing teachers with accurate feedback along with good support and training.
- The college has an accurate view of its own performance and joint lesson observations carried out with leaders during the inspection confirmed this. Senior leaders carry out a systematic programme of lesson observations and hold teachers to account for the progress of their students. There is also regular checking of the work in students' exercise books and the progress they are making. Leaders have not been afraid to take firm and decisive action to tackle weak teaching. As a result, students' achievement and the quality of teaching are quickly improving.
- Heads of faculty provide appropriate interventions to support students at risk of falling behind. This helps explain why the progress of current students is more rapid than has been the case in the past. In most cases, their monitoring is improving as they are being held more accountable for the performance of the teachers in their faculties. However, there are instances when the quality of marking does not match the best in the college and checks undertaken by the head of faculty have not had the same positive impact seen elsewhere.
- A group of middle leaders play a key role in improving the quality of teaching. They have provided training for the whole staff as well as more personalised training and support for some teachers. This has contributed to the improvements now being seen in teaching.
- Performance management systems are robust and are aligned well to the Teachers' Standards. Clear links have been made between teachers' performance and pay rises and some staff have not had pay rises as a result.
- The college's procedures for safeguarding students are good and meet all requirements.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students and supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, there is a termly cross curricular project, the most recent being 'The Beach Project' which involved a trip to the beach and developed students geographical skills and created a focus for a design technology project back in college.
- The local authority's support has not been good enough since the time of the last inspection. Not enough has been done to rigorously check and verify the accuracy of information about students' achievement when they begin in Year 5. More positively, governors report that they have benefitted from the training and support they have received from the local authority.
- Staff surveys were overwhelmingly supportive of the college's leaders. There were a small proportion of responses which highlighted the need for greater consistency when managing students' behaviour.
- Parents are increasingly involved in school events. For instance, in 2013 there was a significant increase in the number of parents who attended a meeting to find out about the national tests for Year 6 students. However, in questionnaire and survey responses a small number of parents felt that the communication between home and school was not always as good as it could be. While the college website is up to date in virtually all respects, the latest national test results for 2013 are not available for parents to view.
- **The governance of the school:**

- Since the last inspection, the governing body has gone through a time of turbulence but now there is a greater sense of stability. Governors bring a range of experience from their backgrounds, which include education, finance and business. They have started to challenge the school more effectively. Governors have recently been involved in learning walks around the college and have been looking at students' work, teachers' marking and behaviour. They have identified that the quality of some teaching, marking and behaviour is not good enough. They have also noted that some of the most-able students are not always challenged enough. Governors hold the executive headteacher to account for students' achievement, national test results, the quality of teaching and attendance. Governors have a firm grasp of the finances and the system for pay progression and rewards for good teaching. They have a good understanding of performance management and the Chair of the Governing Body regularly attends senior leadership meetings. Governors ensure that pupil premium funding is well managed and they have effective ways of evaluating its impact on students' achievement.

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	122349
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	430918

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	375
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Scott Dickinson
Headteacher	Christine Graham
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2012
Telephone number	01665 710636
Fax number	01665 713470
Email address	enquiries@jcsc.co.uk

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