



Ripon College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121688
LEA North Yorkshire
Inspection number 281079
Inspection dates 16 February 2006 to 17 February 2006
Reporting inspector Ms Honoree Gordon HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Clotherholme Road
School category	Community		Ripon
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		North Yorkshire HG4 2DE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01765 604 564
Number on roll	630	Fax number	01765 604 564
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Annette Beckwith
Date of previous inspection	11 October 1999	Headteacher	Mr P Lowery

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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

Ripon College is a smaller than average specialist technology college, with a sixth form, drawing on town and rural areas. Numbers have grown considerably in recent years. Ripon has selective education, which affects the ability profile of the students: students enter the college with below average results and often low literacy levels. There are fewer able students than found usually. A high proportion of students come from relatively deprived backgrounds. One in five has a learning difficulty and/or disability (a higher proportion than normally found) and more students than average have a statements of special educational need. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who are vulnerable. Some students are from armed forces families. Recently, the school has been designated an extended school, increasing further its role in the community it serves. The sixth form works in partnership with the grammar school, offering combinations of vocational and academic subjects to students from both schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the college that it provides a satisfactory education and sound value for money. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection; parents can rightly feel proud that their children attend Ripon College. The atmosphere is pleasant; students are open and friendly and appreciate the support they get. The headteacher's vision and high expectations have driven the college forward and it has good capacity to improve further. It has focused successfully on raising standards, which are now broadly average. The college provides technological and vocational education which equips students with the skills required for the next stage in their education or career, notably in information and communication technology (ICT). Education is closely tailored to the needs of the local community.

Technology college status has contributed significantly to making education enjoyable and successful for students. Good teaching is making a difference and staff go out of their way to provide a range of interesting activities. Students' progress is in line with national expectations and in the first few years it is good, particularly in science. The momentum is less in Years 10 and 11, though the picture there is improving.

Sixth form education is satisfactory; although some grades are lower than average because, unusually, the sixth form admits students with a wide range of abilities. Some successfully combine employment with study, reflecting well the college's aim of promoting lifelong learning. An effective partnership with the grammar school provides a range of courses to suit individuals.

The college is well led, but systems to monitor progress and promote good behaviour are not consistent. The personal, social, citizenship and health education programme (PSCHE) is being reviewed to promote further students' personal development.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory; it is growing and developing. It is well led, with clear vision for the future. Close, effective partnership with the grammar school is already enhancing the opportunities for students of both establishments. This partnership is broadening the curriculum and the range of qualifications to better meet the needs and aspirations of the growing number of students. Students can follow a mixture of academic and vocational qualifications. The personal development of students is good. Students enjoy their studies and feel well supported academically and personally, with many opportunities to enrich their studies. They can also exercise leadership; for example, through work with Year 7 or through charity fundraising. Standards are average, though some grades are lower than this because the sixth form is so inclusive. Students bring a number of skills or individual talents with them on entry, apart from academic ones and make satisfactory progress, given their different starting points. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with examples of good practice. The best teaching helps students to understand very clearly how they can improve their performance.

The sixth form head is rightly continuing to focus on the quality of teaching, in particular by making more effective use of assessment and target setting.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work together across subjects on how best to track students' progress and use this information to help challenge and support all groups of students.
- Continue to develop the sixth form in effective partnership with others in order to encourage good progress and high standards.
- Develop further the PSCHÉ programme to promote students personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards have risen and are now broadly average, because teaching is good and because staff and students are set challenging targets. There is a culture of high expectations in the college; it has met the local authority's agreed targets.

From the outset, the focus is on improving standards, especially in literacy. The college provides a good foundation in basic skills in the first three years, to help students cope with general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) or equivalent courses. Further development is underway for social and other skills through the PSCHÉ programme.

Students make good early progress in all the core subjects and very good progress in science. They reach the nationally expected standards at the end of Year 9.

In Years 10 and 11, progress is slower but remains satisfactory. Standards in the school overall have improved, but the figures for GCSE results including English and mathematics are still quite low. This is not out of line with the national pattern and the college is working hard on this. Results in some subjects, such as applied science, are good. Students' ICT skills are good, because of the extensive opportunities for applying these in other subjects. Students can extend personal talents and interests; for example, in a music lesson, students were developing good quality and imaginative compositions using technology.

The relative progress of boys and girls varies from year to year, but there is no clear system for determining how particular groups of students are doing overall to help determine priorities for action. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students make progress in line with others.

Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory, though some grades are below the national average because some students have continued difficulties with literacy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Their social and moral development are good; students are encouraged to consider the impact of their actions on others. Year 11 students take on responsibility as prefects and in the house system, which brings all students together to work cooperatively and competitively. Students' views are valued and they appreciate the work of the student council. Students are well prepared for future employment, through vocational courses and good careers advice. However, opportunities are missed in assemblies and form tutor time for students to reflect on matters beyond their everyday experience, and many students have only limited knowledge of cultures other than their own. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle but are often reluctant to put this principle into practice. For example, too many students smoke, healthy options on offer in the dining room are ignored, and too few older girls take part in extra curricular sport. The college is reviewing its PSCE programme to try to address some of these concerns.

Students appreciate the 'relaxed but purposeful' atmosphere. Attendance is improving and is now broadly average. Attitudes to learning are satisfactory; students enjoy lessons when actively involved but become bored if a lesson is less engaging. Students report that behaviour has improved recently. Behaviour is satisfactory in most lessons. Students feel safe in school; any reported incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning have improved faster than the college realises and most lessons are now good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and most manage their classes effectively. Their positive relationships with students underpin the college's increasing standards.

Teachers plan lessons effectively, often setting challenging objectives, which they discuss and summarise with students. Classroom assistants provide valuable support to teachers and students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated and progress in line with their peers.

Teachers use ICT frequently and very skilfully, including interactive whiteboards, to add interest to lessons. The best lessons are adapted to students' preferred learning styles, presentations are clear, and there are opportunities for independent work. Students respond enthusiastically when lessons are fast-paced, stimulating and involve working together in groups or pairs on tasks. They contribute confidently, though there are too few opportunities for them to explain or clarify their ideas at length. In

slower-paced lessons, some students stop trying their best. This leads occasionally to immature behaviour from a few students, which prevents others learning.

Many teachers track effectively how students are doing in their subject and set sharply focused individual targets to encourage learning, but there is no set system across the whole college. Occasionally, students get away with incomplete or poorly presented work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. It has developed along vocational lines to reflect technology status and to fit the overall pattern of educational opportunities locally. The college's innovative approach has attracted attention nationally. ICT features extensively in all subjects; this motivates students and helps improve standards. Literacy and numeracy are adequately developed, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is personalised. The pathways have a strong practical appeal, with flexibility through virtual learning or work related opportunities. The range of courses and qualifications meets students' needs well and links to opportunities for further education, training or employment locally. Students requiring particular support are well catered for, and there is some 'fast-tracking' for able students. The PSCE programme provides satisfactorily for wider needs, although the citizenship element does not stand out sufficiently. Performing arts, music and sport form part of an extensive extracurricular programme, sometimes organised by the students themselves.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, this is satisfactory and appreciated by students and their parents. The requirements for safeguarding students are in place, but risk assessments in some subjects are not sufficiently rigorous. The college has good systems for managing behaviour, such as the 'ladder of intervention', but teachers' responses to low-level disruptive behaviour are inconsistent.

Student Services provide very effective and wide-ranging support for students, staff and parents. Unit 5 offers a good environment for students who are underachieving or becoming disaffected, where learning can continue whilst students reflect on where things are going wrong and how to resolve problems. These initiatives have led to a reduction in exclusions.

Homework, opportunities for help outside lessons and easy access to ICT facilities reinforce progress made in lessons. However, college data-tracking systems are insufficiently developed in all years to be able to pinpoint underachieving students early and then intervene to tackle any identified weaknesses.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The college is well led and managed. Its reputation has grown. The headteacher knows its strengths and weaknesses well and has correctly identified priorities for the future. He takes a lead role in educational partnership initiatives and enjoys the strong support of those involved with the college. He has an honest and open approach, with the clear aim of raising the achievement of all. This is an inclusive school; its capacity to improve is building from within. The headteacher has challenged staff and students to believe that 'they can do it'. As an extended school, the college has involved the community well in providing continuing opportunities in education.

The college has successfully developed its middle managers, using external leadership training and mentoring; these people are crucial to taking the school forward. The roles and responsibilities of the support staff have been increased so that they play an important part too. Lessons are checked regularly and managers have intervened decisively to improve teaching. Teachers have learnt from good practice elsewhere and now share their expertise with other schools, especially in vocational education.

The governing body fulfils its role well as a critical friend and shares the headteacher's vision. The college provides value for money; it has successfully obtained additional funding and used this well to help raise achievement.

The curriculum has been shaped to fit local needs. Technology status has directly contributed to raising standards through providing additional learning resources, more interesting teaching methods and greater opportunities for students to use technology. Assessment practice in some subjects is good, but is not pulled together across the college. Behaviour is monitored, but sanctions are not always consistently applied in lessons.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your college. Your views were very helpful to us. We were also able to read your parents' opinions, talk to teachers and other adults connected with the college and to visit some of your lessons. We are satisfied with the education your college provides and we think your headteacher leads it well. Your parents know that the school cares and supports you. It has really improved since the last inspection - well done! You can be proud of your college. A summary of our main findings is below.

- Your results in tests and examinations have improved and are now around what we would expect to find.
- Your rate of progress is also in line with other, similar schools and is particularly good in Years 7 to 9, where the important foundations are laid.
- The range and choice of subjects are good and in the sixth form the partnership with the grammar school is effective in extending the opportunities to study both academic and vocational subjects.
- Being a specialist technology college has a lot to do with the improvement.
- The courses you choose are useful for further study or for getting jobs.
- Teaching is generally good; teachers have worked hard at trying to make lessons interesting and the class assistants support you well.
- Mostly, you concentrate well but it is important you try to cut out any silly behaviour - we know this only applies to a few of you, but it does hold back progress in some lessons.
- Attendance is better; it is more like other schools now - it is pretty obvious to us that it is important to attend school regularly if you want to do well!
- Your personal development is satisfactory, but we are concerned about some health issues, such as smoking and not eating sensibly; we urge you to think about adopting some of what the college tells you about living healthily.

The sixth form is fine, it is growing in the right direction and we think it provides good opportunities for your personal development.

- We were pleased to see older students taking on leadership roles.
- You feel safe at school and tell us that any bullying is dealt with.
- Your parents know that the school cares and supports you; the work of the Student Services and the unit 5 makes a big difference.

We have made some suggestions to the school:

- look more carefully at how different groups of students are doing
- continue the good work developing the sixth form
- develop further the PSCE programme to tackle some of our concerns and to help prepare you for life outside college.

We certainly believe that the college can continue to move these things forward, because we can see the evidence of what has been done already. We heard many people tell us that the reputation of the college has grown. Please remember how important a good education is to you and keep trying your best. We found you to be cheerful and open with us and we wish you well for the future.