

Mortimer Comprehensive School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 108727 |
| Local Authority | South Tyneside |
| Inspection number | 288169 |
| Inspection dates | 19–20 April 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Joe Clark |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1030 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Ian Palmer |
| Headteacher | Ms Claire Mullane |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 January 2003 |
| School address | Reading Road South Shields Tyne and Wear NE33 4UG |
| Telephone number | 0191 4566511 |
| Fax number | 0191 4271176 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a slightly larger than average school serving a mixed area but one that, overall, is socially and economically disadvantaged. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Roughly one in ten students come from a minority ethnic background; a few do not have English as their first language. The school has the ArtsMark Gold Award and has applied to become a specialist Sports and Arts College. It is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards are rising and students' achievement is improving at a faster rate than in recent years. Students' personal development and the quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. The care, guidance and support students receive are good. The majority of parents are pleased with what the school offers but a small minority are concerned about standards of behaviour and consultation opportunities. While there is still a way to go, the leadership team, including senior managers, governors and headteacher are showing good capacity for further improvement.

When students enter the school in Year 7, their academic standards, particularly in reading, speaking and listening, are below average. They make satisfactory progress overall, but some groups achieve better than others. Bangladeshi and other minority ethnic students, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the more able groups make the fastest progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Standards in drama, dance and sport are much higher than in other subjects whilst GCSE results in Bengali are usually above average. Standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, particularly in English and mathematics. Too many students have left school recently without any formal qualifications, a situation now addressed through new curriculum opportunities at the end of Year 10.

Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. The most effective lessons are often lively and challenging and students learn well. In a minority of lessons the restlessness and inattention students sometimes bring to lessons inhibits learning and slows progress. The school insists on maintaining a high standard of behaviour and students' attitudes and behaviour overall are satisfactory, both in lessons and around the school. Marking does not always give students sufficient guidance on how to improve their work. Whilst most students enjoy coming to school, attendance is below average.

The curriculum adequately meets the needs of all groups of students. Extra-curricular activities to support and enhance learning are good. Students are well cared for and receive good levels of personal and academic support. Teachers work extremely hard and give a great deal of their out of school time to provide students with extra opportunities for revision and examination preparation. Students with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities and students whose first language is not English are well supported.

The headteacher and senior leaders, supported by an effective governing body, are leading and managing the school in ways that are leading to rising standards, both personal and academic. Their evaluation of what needs to be done to bring about further improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning and the standards students reach, is accurate and their planning to achieve their goals is robust. 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.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Improve behaviour in lessons so that all students can learn effectively.
- Ensure students know what it is they have to do to improve their work.
- Raise attendance to at least average levels.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school with standards that are below average, particularly in reading, speaking and listening skills. Both boys and girls in general, and students entitled to free school meals, make satisfactory progress but more able students, minority ethnic students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make faster progress than other groups. By the end of Year 9, standards remain below average, including in English and mathematics, but have been rising in recent years. Results in national tests in 2006 at the end of Year 9 showed a big improvement on 2005. By the end of Year 11, standards are below average. GCSE and other results improved significantly in 2005 and were sustained in 2006. In 2006, GCSE and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) results were adversely affected by weak attendance and the inclusion in the statistics of a group of students who joined the school during Years 10 and 11. Current evidence from the school's own data, including that where modular marks in some subjects have already been recorded, show that standards are continuing to rise. Standards in drama, dance and physical education (PE) are above average and students achieve well in these subjects. Results in Bengali are usually above average. In 2006, the proportion of students who left school without a pass in any subject was above average. However, the school is currently taking steps to tackle this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development is satisfactory. Most students enjoy coming to school and value the opportunities that it provides. A positive social and learning atmosphere prevails. Attitudes and behaviour in class are satisfactory but variable. Where teaching is good it promotes interest, effort and full engagement, but restlessness and inattention can slow the pace of learning in weaker lessons, especially in mixed ability and lower ability groups. Around the site and at lesson change, behaviour is satisfactory. Students say that they feel safe in school and that any bullying is dealt with fairly but firmly. Racist incidents are infrequent. However, instances of poor conduct resulting in exclusion, both internal and external, are too high. Attendance rates are improving but they are still below average, especially in Year 11, and they act as a brake on the progress that many students make.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Students speak enthusiastically about the improved atmosphere in the school and the fact that lunchtime meals now offer them the opportunity to eat healthily. They respond well to the good range of opportunities to take responsibility, for example fundraising for charities and acting as mentors for younger students. They point to the success of the school council in initiating improvements. The development of social skills combined with competencies with computers, literacy and number form a secure platform for most students' future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. During the inspection some good teaching motivated learning well and captured students' interest. In such lessons, teachers challenged students through skilful questioning and included a variety of practical and theoretical activities. These

lessons were lively and thought-provoking; they provided good opportunities for students to develop learning through building on their mistakes. In a minority of lessons, students' poor attitudes detracted from the learning of others. This was mainly because the content and pace of the lessons were not focused sharply enough on students' exact needs. Teachers control students' learning too much in some lessons. All students would benefit from greater encouragement to be more actively involved in their own learning.

Teachers use information from whole-school assessment procedures well to determine targets and measure progress towards them. The quality of marking and feedback to students has improved since the previous inspection, but there are still some inconsistencies that inhibit students' understanding of exactly what it is that they need to do to improve. The good practices identified by self-evaluation are used insufficiently to improve the quality of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. All statutory requirements are met, apart from the teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 11 where not all students are taught the National Curriculum in ICT. The school has measures in place to provide for this through the computer technology work done across subjects. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all students. For example, satisfactory provision is made in Years 10 and 11 for those students who wish to combine the core academic subjects with vocational study. Satisfactory provision is also made for the teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to engage in work-related learning activities. Additional revision and booster classes are organised when the school's good tracking system identifies weaknesses in students' performance. Education for healthy living is good. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which extends students' understanding and enjoyment of the work done in class. These activities are well attended. New curriculum arrangements have been made to ensure that all students gain some accreditation at the end of Year 10.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and government requirements are met. Good procedures are in place for child protection. Risk assessments are carried out regularly, particularly when visits are made out of school. Good provision is made to support and guide students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language. As a result many exceed the learning targets set for them. The school has an effective system for tracking students' progress over time and is quick to give help when weaknesses are uncovered. Learning mentors are used extensively to support such students. Vulnerable students are identified early and good liaison with outside agencies ensures their personal, social and academic needs are met. The school recognises that form tutors are not closely involved in the monitoring of students' academic progress and has this as a priority for development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the appointment of the current leadership team there have been improvements in several areas of the school's performance. Systems of accountability, for example, in how well students perform in external examinations, are much more robust. Data are now used effectively to set targets for both teachers and students, particularly in the use of Monitoring Individual Student Achievement (MISA) grades. The challenging targets the school sets itself for the end of Year 9 and 11 national tests have not been met in recent years but the gap is narrowing and the targets themselves are now much more securely based on accurate data. There is clear direction from the headteacher on the need to ensure standards continue to rise. Links with parents are satisfactory. A small minority of parents would like subject teachers to be more easily accessible for consultation. Although inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory, a small minority of parents said that standards in this area were not high enough. Governance is satisfactory. There are effective governor links with curriculum areas and governors ensure statutory requirements are met. Leadership and management, including governance, are having a positive impact on raising academic standards, and there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 behaviour of learners | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 4 |
| 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 | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

The quality of provision

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|---|---|
| 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? | 2 |

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

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| 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 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

21 April 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Mortimer Comprehensive School, Tyne and Wear, NE33 4UG

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we came to carry out the inspection of your school recently. We really appreciated the help you gave us. Below is a summary of what we found.

Based on how well you were doing when you left your primary school, you are doing okay in your academic studies. In some areas such as drama, dance, PE and Bengali, you are doing very well, but in English and mathematics you should be doing much better.

There are two main reasons why you aren't. First, some of you take too much time off school. Second, in some lessons you don't try your best and want to fool around too much. Of course, this only applies to a small minority of you. Most of you work hard and attend regularly but some of you have room for improvement and it's now the time to start again and try to do better.

Your teachers and other adults take good care of you and support you well. They provide a good range of extra-curricular activities for you to take part in. I saw some of this myself when I watched your amazing dance presentation following rehearsals during the Easter holidays. Your teachers offer good support and encouragement, through extra revision sessions out of school, to help you succeed in your examinations.

In lessons teachers often set tasks that are interesting and challenging and help you learn. They mark your work regularly but we have asked them to be more explicit in showing you exactly what you need to do to improve it and make it better.

We wish you every success at Mortimer school. With the support of your teachers and other adults we are confident you can do well.

Best wishes for the future.

Joe Clark

Lead inspector