

Mortimer Community College

Reading Road, South Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE33 4UG

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2012

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching is good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers are energetic and enthusiastic. Lessons are briskly paced and contain a good variety of interesting work, which students enjoy.
- Students achieve well and attain high standards on several measures, for example in vocational qualifications.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. It benefits from the school's specialisms in arts and sports. It offers students an extensive range of courses and qualifications. It ensures that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The school is well led. The headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, has successfully initiated a number of changes to accelerate students' progress and improve teaching.
- Students' behaviour is good. They behave sensibly in class and around the building at all times. They want to do well and work hard.
- Students feel safe and well cared for.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Few students get an A*/A grade at GCSE. Results in English and mathematics, though improving, are still a little below average.
- Some managers are still developing their skills in the way they analyse the school's performance.
- The least effective lessons do not provide enough challenge for the most able students. In some classes, students do not develop skills for learning independently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons. These included two joint observations with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students; with the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor; with school staff, including senior and middle managers; and with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school's self-evaluation summary, development plan and assessment information.
- They analysed 24 responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 41 questionnaires returned by school staff.

Inspection team

Derek Neil, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Lynne Horton	Additional Inspector
Julie Rimmer	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mortimer Community College is an average-sized secondary school. It is a specialist school for arts and sports.
- Most students are White British. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and of those who speak English as an additional language are broadly average. A small number of these are in the early stages of learning English.
- A high proportion of the students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students identified with special educational needs through school action is average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- A very small number of students receive all or part of their education with alternative providers. These are: St Mary's Alternative Provision, B-Skills and Skillforce.
- It meets the current government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment by:
 - helping students to get better results in mathematics and English
 - providing more difficult work in class for the most able students so more achieve A*/A grades at GCSE.
- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring all staff observe the school's policy for marking and assessing students' work effectively
 - making it very clear in lessons what students are meant to learn and carefully designing activities to achieve those outcomes
 - training staff in how to help the weaker readers with their comprehension skills
 - developing students' skills for learning independently.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - continuing to help all managers monitor their areas of responsibility so they have a full and accurate picture of what is going well and what is not
 - providing a better written record of what each teacher is meant to achieve over the year, particularly in terms of their students' progress
 - getting governors and staff to be more aware of the government's analyses of examination results so they understand better what needs to improve.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress and attain high standards in some of the qualifications they take.
- GCSE results in English and mathematics have been below average but have improved steadily since the previous inspection. The school's own assessment information strongly indicates that further improvements are in the pipeline for students currently at the school.
- Not enough of the most able students get the A*/A grades of which they are capable. Senior leaders recognise this and are taking steps to deal with it.
- The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs has been patchy in the past. They now make good progress in lessons and in small-group sessions with specialist teachers. However, managers find it difficult to analyse and present data in a way that demonstrates how much progress these students make over time.
- Students who speak English as an additional language make good progress because of the intensive support they get in class from the dedicated team in school.
- Students who are eligible for funding from the pupil premium achieve better results than similar students elsewhere in the country. Their scores in GCSE and other examinations continue to rise.
- Students take pride in their work. Much of it is very neat and beautifully presented. They read well and many are keen readers out of school. In class, they have very good attitudes to learning: they pay close attention to the teacher and are motivated to succeed in their examinations.
- The school enters some students for GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11. The practice has had a beneficial effect on students' attitudes to learning and on their understanding of how to improve. It has generated new opportunities in the curriculum. In subjects where it has not worked to students' benefit the practice has been scrapped. It does not limit the grades students get.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is lively and energetic. Teachers prepare imaginative, interesting activities and get students actively involved. Students enjoy lessons and make good progress. They recognise that teaching has improved recently.
- Relationships between staff and students are very good. Teachers command respect and trust from their students. They make sure students behave well in class and encourage them to do their best.
- Teachers know their subjects well. In particular, they have a good knowledge of how to help students get a good grade in examinations.
- Some teachers mark students' work extremely well. They do this frequently, accurately pointing out areas that need improvement. They pay attention to errors in spelling and punctuation and to poor presentation. They make sure students read this advice and do something about it. Other staff are less diligent. Some books are marked rarely or not at all. Spelling and punctuation errors pass without comment.
- Some staff use the school's policy for assessing students' work in class very effectively. For instance, their students learn a lot from marking their classmates' work. However, in other classes, students assess their classmates' or their own work to no good effect because they lack the necessary skills. For instance, in one lesson students marked their partner's punctuation without knowing themselves how to use apostrophes. As a result, they made little progress.
- In better lessons the teacher sets work at the right level of difficulty for all of the students, even when there is a wide spread of ability in the class. For example, in a Spanish lesson the less able students practised conjugating verbs, while the more able were expected to use the verbs in extended sentences. This feature is not widespread. In particular, in too many lessons the most

able do not get work that enables them to make rapid progress.

- In the small number of lessons that are outstanding, students work and learn without undue reliance on the teacher. In one class, the teacher reminded a student: 'First, think. If you are still stuck, ask someone. If that doesn't work come to me.' Too few lessons, however, develop students' skills in learning independently.
- In some lessons it is not clear to the students what they are meant to be learning. At times, the activities or the way the work is sequenced do not enable students to learn what the teacher intends.
- Teachers working with students who find reading difficult help them to identify unfamiliar words but are less effective in developing other skills, such as comprehension.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave very well in class and around the school. They are courteous to adults and behave respectfully towards each other. They are sensible as they move along the corridors or sit in their favourite spots with friends at break.
- Students feel safe in school. They report there are no areas where they are afraid to go. Students who are new to the school say they settle quickly and do not feel intimidated by the older students. Students know how to keep themselves safe on the internet, for example by adjusting their privacy settings on social networking sites.
- Bullying is rare. When it occurs it is dealt with in the right way by staff. School records indicate that the number of racist incidents is declining significantly. Students know the school deals with such incidents robustly and fully understand why.
- Students' good behaviour is due to the school's hard work. Senior managers monitor the various sanctions available to staff and are successfully reducing their use. The number of students excluded from school, for example, has fallen considerably and is now quite low.
- Attendance was poor until recently. The school has tackled the problem in earnest. As a result, attendance has risen significantly and is now broadly average. Parents, carers and students are left in no doubt that absence without a good reason is not tolerated. As one student stated, 'We can't learn if we're not here.'
- Students' punctuality has also improved. During the inspection the great majority of students were on time to school in the morning and to each lesson.
- A very small number of students have their lessons away from school at centres run by other organisations. This has helped them improve their behaviour and attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the strong and sympathetic leadership of the headteacher, the school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Recent improvements in achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance are due to her skill in taking the staff with her as fundamental changes were introduced.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have used this to produce an admirably concise and clear plan for improvement. However, the plan's effectiveness is limited because it is not underpinned by specific actions spelling out how each member of staff is to contribute.
- Teaching has improved because of the successful approach to managing staff's performance. Managers observe lessons, arrive at accurate judgements about their quality and work closely with staff to make teaching better. However, teachers' targets for improving students' progress, their success in meeting these targets, and the way this is linked to pay are not clear or well documented.

- Staff who have responsibility for subjects or for other aspects of the school's work are more effective than two years ago, but there is still room for improvement. They do not fully understand how information about students' progress can be used to improve things. They monitor their areas of responsibility but do not get an accurate picture when things go wrong. For example, they have not noted the failure of some staff to use the school's policies on marking, assessment and matching work to students' ability.
- The local authority is aware of the school's examination results and the rise in attainment. It has provided effective support for different aspects of the school's work, for example students' attendance and behaviour.
- The school promotes equal opportunities effectively. It acted swiftly when it discovered boys were underachieving; now many lessons are designed to capture boys' interest. Its dedicated team of specialists has worked effectively to ensure students with English as an additional language participate in normal lessons and make good progress.
- The curriculum offers students a variety of opportunities including a range of qualifications that prepare them well for life after school. The great majority proceed to further study or work. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This, to a large extent, is because the school's specialisms provide important formative experiences, such as leadership in sport and consideration of moral issues in drama.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are involved in the life of the school, are kept well informed by the headteacher, and know its strengths and weaknesses. They have a sound understanding of how the school uses the pupil premium funding and its impact, and of how performance management is used to improve teaching. They recognise that some of them would benefit from a fuller understanding of the government's analyses of the school's examination results. They have undertaken training in aspects of their role but acknowledge further opportunities would be beneficial, particularly for newer governors.

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	108727
Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	401002

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	843
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Palmer
Headteacher	Claire Mullane
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2010
Telephone number	0191 456 6511
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