

Pleckgate High School Mathematics and Computing College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119715
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	313404
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sonya Williamson HMI

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 on roll	1,202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ruth Pimley
Headteacher	Mr Robin Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	October 2004
School address	Pleckgate Road Blackburn Lancashire BB1 8QA
Telephone number	01254 249134
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pleckgate High School Mathematics and Computing College is a larger school than is typical nationally. It has significantly more boys than girls. Very few students do not receive all of their secondary education at Pleckgate. Most students are from Indian, Pakistani and White British ethnic backgrounds. The school draws many of its students from areas that have high social deprivation. The proportions of students entitled to free school meals is high and increasing, as is the proportion who do not have English as their first language. Although the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than that found nationally, the proportion having a statement of special educational need is lower. The school has achieved several awards. It has National Healthy Schools Status, Investors in People, Sportsmark Bronze and the Careers Guidance Quality Standard.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pleckgate is a good school. Several aspects of its work are outstanding. It is rightly popular with parents who value the positive and caring ethos that permeates all aspects of its work. Students enjoy school greatly. When asked by inspectors why attendance was good, one student said, 'They just can't keep us away!' The standards attained by students are in line with those found nationally, whilst their achievement is good. It is improving in both key stages overall because achievement is closely tracked and appropriate interventions are made if students are falling behind in relation to their challenging targets. Discrepancies between standards in different subjects are reducing. All groups of students progress equally well since equality of opportunity is clearly promoted. Students progress well because teaching and learning are good overall and because students understand the value of education and work hard. Teaching has many strengths, including the variety of teaching and learning styles used. However not enough teachers sufficiently encourage students to be actively involved in their own learning and so develop their independent learning skills. Similarly, although some teachers mark work well, particularly in Key Stage 4, the quality of marking is not yet consistent enough across the school to ensure that all students understand how to improve their work.

As a result of the outstanding care, guidance and support that students receive, they make outstanding progress in their personal development. Students behave well and safely. They increasingly adopt healthy lifestyles, by taking up the extensive opportunities for physical exercise as part of the outstanding extra-curricular provision, for example. The curriculum is also outstanding since it meets the needs and interests of students so well. It is increasingly personalised for individual students, reflecting the high levels of care, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is very well enhanced through partnership working and through the benefits resulting from specialist status. This has not only increased the use of information and communications technology but has widened the scope of the school's work at local, national and international levels for the benefit of students. The opinions of students, parents and community partners are valued and acted upon. Students, for example are now included as part of the teacher recruitment process.

The leadership and management of the school are good and show good capacity to improve all aspects of the school's work. Leaders and managers know the school and its individual students well. They have sound systems through which they check the quality of the provision and the impact it has on students' personal and academic achievement. However, there are some inconsistencies in the ways that strengths and areas for development are identified and in the opportunities that are created to enable best practice to be shared. This means, for example, that there is scope to improve the proportion of good or better teaching. Governors of the school are committed to ensuring that the school is an effective learning community. They discharge their responsibilities well, ensure that value for money is good and that all health and safety procedures are in place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better.
- Increase the active participation of students in their own learning.
- Improve the consistency of marking across the school to ensure that all students understand how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good and standards are broadly in line with those found nationally. Students arrive at the school having achieved standards below those expected of eleven year olds, with larger than expected proportions of students whose attainment is at the middle and lower end of the ability range. From these starting points students make good progress and attain standards that are satisfactory overall. By the end of Key Stage 4 the percentage of students who gain five GCSE pass grades and the percentage who achieve five higher grades including functional English and mathematics are above those found nationally. However, the percentage attaining five higher grade GCSEs is slightly below that found nationally.

Some students achieve standards that are above national expectations, for example in mathematics. The very good achievement in mathematics was evidenced by some dynamic teaching in mathematics seen during the inspection. Standards in both mathematics and English have continuously improved for three years. Good systems are in place to sustain these rates of improvement as a result of additional support for learning and good opportunities for students to revise and prepare for examinations. GCSE results continue to improve and in 2007 were the best in the school's history.

There is no significant variation in the progress made by different groups of learners. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and more vulnerable students also make good progress. However there is some variation in performance across subjects with standards and achievement being below national averages in electronics, geography and science in Key Stage 4. Challenging specialist school targets were met or exceeded.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well being of students is outstanding. Students behave well; they are unfailingly polite and well mannered. They respond well to the excellent role models provided by the staff and make the school a calm, harmonious place. Students say they enjoy being in school because 'teachers make learning fun'. Attendance is good because 'school is a nice experience'. A very active and democratically elected school council continue to make a difference in school, for example through suggesting the shelter for Year 7. All students work together to make significant charitable donations locally, regionally and internationally, in a clear demonstration of community spirit. They are proud to be members of the school, and show respect for each other, for their prefects, and for their teachers. They fully

understand the value of learning, feel they are treated fairly, and extol the effectiveness of the rewards' and sanctions' system. Moral, social, and cultural development are outstanding; spiritual development is good. Students insist that bullying is not commonplace, because, as a Year 10 student said, 'we have a shared responsibility for each other'. But they also recognise the secure procedures the school has for dealing with any such incidents. The great majority show good awareness of healthy living through diet and exercise. Participation rates are high in the wide range of sporting, cultural and creative activities the school offers. Students are very well equipped for the next stage of their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Students value their lessons, show positive attitudes to their work and, as a result of well planned lessons, make good progress. The best lessons have good pace with a variety of activities that provide challenge, full engagement and independent learning. Teachers' high expectations and good subject knowledge result in effective learning and rapid gains in students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers work well with classroom assistants to support students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their needs are fully met and their achievement is good. Relationships are respectful which leads to a productive learning environment. Behaviour in lessons is good.

Leaders and managers routinely monitor the quality of lessons and improvements, for example, an increased emphasis on checking students' understanding, are being made. However, some areas for development have not been given sufficient emphasis. Teachers do not routinely provide enough opportunities to involve students in their own learning. Marking does not always set out clearly what students need to do to improve. Homework varies in quality and quantity between subjects and year groups. New teachers receive good induction.

Regular communication with parents and carers promotes good home-school relationships. This assists students to achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum for students is outstanding, particularly in Year 10 and 11. It is kept under annual review to ensure that it meets the ambitions and aspirations of all. An increasing emphasis on work related learning and vocational education ensures that students are fully prepared to meet the challenges of life after school. Very effective links with several local organisations enable the school to tailor courses of study to cater successfully for girls and boys across the full range of ability. School leaders constantly seek to improve achievement further by identifying different strategies to meet the needs of all students, for example, through an increasing focus on personalised learning. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is good. There is effective provision for students who need additional literacy support. The course for

citizenship is presently in transition. Issues around aspects of delivery and assessment in this subject in Key Stage 3 are being addressed.

Extra-curricular activities are extremely wide ranging, including some with national and international dimensions. They ensure that students are provided with many opportunities to display their skills and ingenuity, and to pursue their ideas and ambitions to the greatest possible extent. The success of a team of three girls in winning a national environment awareness competition to secure a ten day trip of a lifetime within the Arctic Circle is testament to this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute strongly to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being. Students particularly value the practical guidance they are given through the setting of individual targets and some teacher's marking, though this is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. The large number of teaching assistants is deployed very effectively to support all students' learning needs. Students and parents agree that students are looked after very well by the highly effective pastoral care system that insists on respect, responsibility and rights. Careful attention is paid to health and safety issues and child protection. Rigorous and sensitive induction procedures help students who arrive in Year 7 to settle quickly into their new routines. Excellent careers guidance contributes to nearly all Year 11 students moving successfully to the next phase of their education, training or employment. There are very effective links with parents that support students' learning. These links are very well enhanced by the energetic efforts of the trusted home/school liaison workers and help make the school a harmonious and cohesive community. Furthermore, contributions from a range of local agencies safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most staff consistently praise students' achievements which helps them aspire to achieve highly. One student commented, 'We hope to do better than the best results the school got last year'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. This is because leaders and managers at all levels set an exceptionally clear direction for improvement. The school has begun to use increasingly challenging targets well to raise standards further. The trend of improvement in both standards and rates of progress of students is further supported by the excellent care and guidance they receive. Leaders at all levels give a high priority to care. Their active involvement with students on a daily basis also promotes this. The senior and middle leaders know most of the school's strengths and areas for development very well. Leaders are increasingly accurate in their self-evaluation, although they underestimate the strengths of the school. Staff at all levels are clearly held accountable for the quality of their work. The school has apt systems for checking and evaluating its work. This has led to effective whole school improvement planning and a strengthening of improvement planning by middle leaders. Many middle leaders appropriately involve teachers in checking and evaluating the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. This enables the

accurate identification of professional development needs. However, there are some inconsistencies in the ways that leaders and managers identify and address areas for development and create opportunities to share best practice. This limits for example, the opportunities for less effective teachers to learn from the best.

The physical and human resources of the school are good; both have been considerably enhanced by the school's specialist status and the wealth of community and partnership working. Staff, including support and non-teaching staff, are very well deployed to maintain the focus on raising achievement even further. Value for money is good. Governors carry out their responsibilities with integrity and insight. They are actively involved in both challenging and supporting the full range of the school's work. The headteacher is reflective and committed and leads effectively with vision to enable the school to keep moving forward.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	NA
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

30 November 2007



Dear Students

**Inspection of Pleckgate High School Mathematics and Computing College,
Blackburn with Darwen, BB1 8QA**

I and the other inspectors really enjoyed our visit to your school and you made a great contribution to our enjoyment. You helped us find our way around and you spoke to us with confidence. We soon realised that you treat each other, and all those you come into contact with during the school day, very well.

We have found that Pleckgate is a good school with a calm, harmonious atmosphere. The fact that your school has specialist status really helps Mr Campbell to improve the resources you have and the quality of the school's work. You make good academic progress and outstanding personal progress. This is because teaching and the work of leaders and managers are good and the care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding. Your school consults you well and values your opinions. The quality of the curriculum that is planned for you and the opportunities you have outside lessons are excellent. They are enriched because the school works well with other organisations such as primary schools and colleges. You take full advantage of these opportunities because you told us you enjoy school and value the experiences it provides. Your hard work is not confined to school. We saw that you make excellent positive contributions to the local, national and international communities. You are rightly proud of your achievements and your competition wins.

To improve the school further we have asked the leaders and managers to help your teachers to learn from each other more. This is so that the very best teaching and learning ideas are spread around the school. We have asked the teachers to give you more opportunities to get involved in your own learning. We saw in many lessons that you have the maturity to take this seriously and that it helps your independent skills. Some teachers mark your work in a way that shows you clearly what you need to do to improve it and so achieve higher standards. We have asked all your teachers to do this in both key stages so that you can take more responsibility for your own progress.

Your teachers have high expectations of you. We know you have high hopes for yourselves too. We wish you the very best of luck in the future.

Best wishes

Sonya Williamson HMI