

Cowley International College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104829
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	377133
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,570
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	360
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	T Narayanan
Principal	Cameron Sheeran
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2007
School address	Hard Lane St Helens WA10 6PN
Telephone number	01744 678030
Fax number	01744 678031
Email address	cowley@sthelens.org.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	23–24 November 2011
Inspection number	377133

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 52 lessons taught by 52 teachers. They held meetings with senior leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, students, a member of staff from St Helens Rugby League Football Club and an external consultant who works in partnership with the school. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including data regarding students' progress, school improvement plans, monitoring reports, departmental self-evaluations and procedures for safeguarding students. Inspectors analysed 222 questionnaires completed by parents and carers as well as 76 completed by staff and 153 responses from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The rates at which different groups of students make progress, especially in mathematics.
- The extent to which students are engaged and independent in their learning.
- The effectiveness of leaders at all levels in evaluating performance and sharing good practice.
- The rates of attendance among different groups of students.

Information about the school

Cowley International College is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national figure. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school has specialist status for languages, applied learning and sport. It holds numerous awards including Artsmark, Healthy School status, Fairtrade School, Investors in People, Sportsmark and International Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Cowley International College is a good and improving school, characterised by proud traditions and innovative partnerships. The college's international dimension underpins its inclusive ethos and imaginative provision within a safe and vibrant environment. Students enjoy their learning and make good progress. Attainment has risen since the previous inspection and is now close to the national average in terms of the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics at grades A* to C. The percentage of students gaining five good passes at GCSE or equivalent is consistently much higher than average. Achievement in mathematics, which had been low, has improved in response to strong leadership and concerted action to identify and overcome weaknesses and share good practice in teaching. Standards in mathematics remain lower than in English, but results from students' recent assessments indicate that progress in mathematics is accelerating.

As 'Cowleians', students lead healthy lifestyles, engaging in a wide range of physical activities and making responsible choices. They contribute enthusiastically to the running of the college and make a real difference to the wider community through voluntary service, charity work and various ambassadorial roles. A feature length film, written, directed and produced by the college and screened in a local cinema, exemplifies the enterprise and aspiration that the college fosters. Students' inquiring minds, empathetic attitudes and firmly held views on right and wrong contribute to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance has risen considerably for all groups of students and is above average.

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good, with an increasing proportion that is outstanding. Students respect their teachers and appreciate the considerable efforts staff make to help them reach their targets and realise their ambitions. The majority of lessons are well-planned, stimulating and thought-provoking. In satisfactory lessons, the level of challenge is not always adjusted to meet students' different needs and some students are unclear as to how to improve their work. The quality of teachers' marking is generally good but their expectations of how students should respond to corrections are inconsistent.

The curriculum is outstanding; a wide range of academic and vocational courses reflect the school's triple specialisms and enable students to pursue their interests. The school has formed strong partnerships with local schools, colleges and

businesses, and with international agencies, to ensure that students benefit from high-quality opportunities to grow into skilled and confident future citizens. The development of a 'schools within a school' approach to pastoral organisation, whereby students' welfare and progress are monitored by dedicated teams, enables all students to be known and nurtured by a very caring and committed staff. Academic monitoring and personal mentoring are closely linked and enable the swift recognition of, and response to, any barriers to achievement. Older students provide excellent support as buddies to younger members of the college and contribute to the college's outstanding care, guidance and support. Rigorous, honest and insightful self-evaluation, leading to improved outcomes and provision, indicate the college's good capacity to sustain further improvement. The college is taking appropriate action to address unevenness in achievement between different subjects. Provision and outcomes in the popular sixth form mirror those found in the main college and tenacious leadership of the sixth form has secured a strong trajectory of improvement since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further accelerate progress and raise attainment in mathematics by:
 - sharing and embedding the good practice that exists within the department with regard to teachers' explanations and questioning of students
 - regularly checking students' learning within lessons.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and outstanding by building on the good practice within school in order to:
 - ensure that lessons provide an appropriate level of challenge for students of different abilities
 - ensure that teachers' feedback makes clear to students how they can improve their work
 - ensure that students take action in response to teachers' comments in their marking.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enjoy all that the college has to offer and achieve well from starting points which are broadly just below average. Attainment has risen more sharply than the national trend over recent years. In 2011, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics was close to the national average. The proportion of students attaining five good grades at GCSE or equivalent qualifications is consistently much higher than the national average, as is the proportion attaining two good science qualifications. Attainment is high in physical education and vocational subjects.

School data and lesson observations confirm that students make good progress. In English, the proportion of students making expected progress from their starting points is higher than that found nationally. Progress in mathematics has been weak

but has now accelerated due to focused leadership and determined action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Additional lessons and individual tuition are helping more students to reach ambitious targets. Clear plans are in place to raise attainment in mathematics further. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that of their peers due to the combination of effective teaching, high-quality support and the provision of curriculum pathways that motivate and engage students.

Students behave well in most lessons and around the school’s extensive and well-designed site. The vast majority are courteous, good-humoured and positive. They arrive punctually to lessons and willingly cooperate when required to work together. One described the school community as ‘happy, friendly and aspirational,’ a view echoed by visitors, parents and carers. Attendance rates have risen significantly and are above average. The number of students who are persistently absent has drastically reduced as a result of sensitive intervention and high-quality support.

Students assume varied responsibilities within their community. Older students keenly support younger ones through a buddying scheme which all parties value as a crucial element of the college’s successful anti-bullying policy. The college’s innovative ‘pulse TV’ enables students to showcase their talents and express their viewpoints while developing high-level technical skills and gaining first-hand experience of the media industry. The college’s charitable and volunteering work is highly regarded in the local community, while the programme of international links enables students to develop new friendships and gain greater understanding of other cultures. The college’s ethos successfully fosters strong moral values. Performing and visual arts subjects enhance students’ cultural awareness. High-quality religious education lessons and a well-planned programme of assemblies, including visits by a range of speakers who are successful in their diverse fields, ensure that students’ spiritual development is strong.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	3
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	2
Pupils’ attendance ¹	
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

Teaching is good overall, with an increasing amount that is outstanding and some that is satisfactory. The best teaching is imaginative, resourceful and effectively tailored to meet the needs of individuals. Students are expected to be reflective and critical thinkers, as exemplified in an outstanding English lesson where they considered influential historic speeches and, in response to skilful questioning by the teacher, developed their analytical skills with an impressive degree of precision. Students also demonstrate perseverance in improving their work and in supporting their peers to achieve highly. Much teaching is successful in promoting students' independent learning, as was the case in an outstanding dance lesson where students were self-directed, providing clear feedback to each other to choreograph and perform skilful routines. In satisfactory lessons, positive relationships generally prevail between teachers and students but activities are not always tailored to meet different students' needs. Teachers' assessments of students' progress are accurate and supported by rigorous moderation activities, including those undertaken with teachers from partner primary schools. Marking is generally of a good standard, with some excellent practice in modern foreign languages, English and vocational subjects. In some cases, students are insufficiently clear as to how they should improve their work to reach the next level. There is a lack of consistency in expectation regarding how students should respond to their teachers' feedback, including the correction of basic literacy errors.

The college's outstanding curriculum provides students with a firm underpinning for further education and adult life. An array of courses has been designed in collaboration with other providers, leading to a very strong vocational offer. An impressive partnership with St Helens Rugby League Football Club engages students and builds on the school's heritage. The international dimension provides memorable cultural and sporting experiences, as well as extending opportunities for the study of modern and classical foreign languages.

Care, guidance and support continue to be a significant strength of the college. Pastoral support is excellent, and there are compelling examples of students who have succeeded 'against the odds' because of the tenacity of teachers in finding ways to help them. Support staff make a significant contribution to students' attendance, enjoyment and accelerating progress. The college works proactively and effectively with a range of agencies, including the on-site police officer, to meet individual needs. Transition programmes supporting students entering the college from primary schools are exemplary.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal provides intelligent, forward-thinking leadership; staff comment that he inspires and motivates them. He is ably supported by a dynamic senior leadership

team who consistently build students’ self-esteem while efficiently monitoring and effectively evaluating all aspects of the college’s performance. Members of the governing body discharge their duties conscientiously and ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorously implemented. Their ‘Everyone Matters’ committee has a significant impact on maintaining the high morale that permeates the college.

A newly qualified teacher commented, ‘it is a privilege to be part of Cowley.’ This view was echoed by many staff who celebrate the sense of ambition and teamwork that the leaders at all levels engender through their enthusiasm and keenness to share good practice. Self-evaluation is detailed and accurate and the college has made good use of an external consultant to validate its judgements. Management systems have been refined to ensure that teachers and leaders identify underachievement and act upon it swiftly. Effective training and development has been provided to ensure that whole-college priorities, including with regard to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, are reflected across departments. The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been addressed successfully. Plans to accelerate progress in mathematics are showing a positive impact and students’ achievement is improving in this subject. The promotion of community cohesion is strong at local and international levels. The college operates as a harmonious and inclusive community in which equality of opportunity is promoted strongly and any gaps in performance between different groups of students are rigorously tackled.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form has expanded considerably since the previous inspection. It provides a good standard of education to students and embodies the ‘Cowleian’ values found in the main college. The outcomes for students following vocational courses and the International Baccalaureate are particularly high. Advanced level results are similar to the national average and improving strongly. There is particularly strong and consistent performance in information and communication technology. Unevenness in subject performance has been recognised by the sixth form leader and plans have been designed, along with subject leaders, to boost performance. The progress

made by all students is continually monitored by the tenacious and dedicated head of sixth form. The vast majority of students entering the sixth form complete their courses. Their personal development is excellent and attendance rates are high. Sixth formers are integral to the life of the main college and provide excellent role models for younger students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires expressed great confidence in the college, which they agreed was well led. They stated that their children were kept safe, were well taught and effectively prepared for the future. One commented, 'this is a great school in every respect', a view endorsed by many in the school's regular survey returns. A few parents and carers expressed concerns relating to the management of unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors considered behaviour in lessons and around the school site and examined records. They found behaviour to be good and its management to be consistent and effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cowley International College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received **222** completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,570 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	89	40	124	56	6	3	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	99	45	119	54	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	113	51	106	48	1	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	99	45	114	51	5	2	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	91	41	125	56	2	1	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	31	139	63	5	2	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	62	28	142	64	14	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	90	41	124	56	2	1	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	81	36	134	60	4	2	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	87	39	111	50	14	5	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	60	27	133	60	13	6	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	97	44	120	51	1	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	111	50	107	48	2	1	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	How well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Cowley International College, St Helens – WA10 6LB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your college recently. We were very impressed with the way in which you displayed 'Cowleian' values, through your positive relationships, healthy lifestyles and ambition for the future. Your willingness to contribute to your college and the wider community of St Helens and beyond is excellent. We agreed with you that the college's international status and triple specialisms provide you with a range of experiences that you will remember throughout your lives. Congratulations on your sporting prowess and your forthcoming movie premiere; you certainly ensure that your college is in the public eye for the right reasons!

The inspection team considers Cowley International College to be a good school. It provides you with a good standard of education and most of you make good progress. Aspects of the college's work are outstanding, including the curriculum you follow and the care you receive. There have been major improvements over the last few years, leading to your improved attendance and rising attainment.

We have asked Mr Sheeran and the staff to increase the amount of teaching which is good and outstanding. Your teachers already work extremely hard and you enjoy most of your lessons. We think the standard can be raised still further. You can help with this by acting on the feedback your teachers give you on how to improve your work, including by thinking about spelling and sentence structure. We have also asked the college to continue its good work in improving mathematics so that more of you make good progress and achieve high standards in this important subject.

On behalf of all the inspectors, I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.