

The West Somerset Community College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136791
Local authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	397488
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2012
Lead inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,229
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin McNeill
Principal	Nick Swann
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 April 2009
School address	Bircham Road Alcombe Minehead Somerset TA24 6AY
Telephone number	01643 706061
Fax number	01643 705700
Email address	office@westsomerset.somerset.sch.uk

Age group	13–18
Inspection date(s)	19–20 June 2012
Inspection number	397488



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child’s school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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 assesses 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 educational 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 St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

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



Introduction

Inspection team

David Howe	Additional inspector
Helen Hutchings	Additional inspector
Gordon Jackson	Additional inspector
Joanna Peach	Additional inspector
Linda Peck	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed a substantial part of 42 lessons involving 40 teachers, some jointly with the Principal, together with short visits to another six lessons and two mentoring sessions. Because a large proportion of students were engaged in external examinations during the inspection, most observations were of Year 9 lessons, with a minority in Years 10 and 12. Inspectors looked at students' work, attended mentoring time, and held discussions with members of the governing body, staff, and groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, students' attainment and progress, teachers' planning, and the curriculum. Inspectors analysed 132 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, as well as others completed by a sample of staff and students.

Information about the school

Most students in this above average-sized school are of White British backgrounds. Few speak English as an additional language. Students attend the college from a wide area, including the town of Minehead and surrounding villages, necessitating long journeys for some students. Students join the college in Year 9, most having attended middle schools in the area. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is average. While the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average, it is increasing steadily. The college gained converter academy status in June 2011. It is a specialist technology college with a rural dimension and has its own farm. It holds International School and National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure status. Many of the college facilities for vocational education are used by the public and local companies. Acorns Nursery and Creche currently operates for a day each week on the college site and is subject to a separate Ofsted inspection. The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- West Somerset is a good college, which is improving steadily year on year. The determined leadership of the Principal and governing body in establishing the college at the heart of its community is key to its success. A highly flexible curriculum meets students' needs exceptionally well by offering opportunities appropriate to local circumstances and individual strengths and interests. The college is not outstanding because there is not enough of the highest quality teaching to bring about rapid progress in every lesson. Attendance is average, but is low for a few students.
- Students achieve well and they make good progress. Attainment is in line with the national average and GCSE results have improved faster than nationally. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are underdeveloped when they join the college. A concerted effort to boost basic skills is successfully promoting students' progress in English and mathematics and in achievement across the curriculum.
- The sixth form is good and improving rapidly. Students make at least good progress and many make outstanding progress across a wide range of academic and vocational subjects, which means that they have a good platform for later learning and employment.
- Teaching is mainly good, with some that is outstanding. The best teaching ensures that students increase their learning quickly because work is matched closely to earlier learning and encourages them to be actively involved. However, in a few lessons, the pace of learning is slower.
- Students behave well and have good attitudes to their learning. They value the range of opportunities and experiences offered by the college, as is shown in a climate of mutual respect. They feel safe at college.
- College self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. There is a consistent and effective approach to developing teaching and managing performance across the college.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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

- Share the existing best practice to increase the proportion of good and better teaching in order that more students make outstanding progress by:
 - ensuring that learning objectives and lesson activities are always matched closely to the range of students' prior attainment in the class
 - giving students more regular opportunities to develop independence and be more active in their learning.
- Build on the strong partnership with the vast majority of parents and carers to improve the attendance of the few students whose frequent absence is a barrier to their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' achievement is good. Most parents and carers are satisfied with the progress students make at the college. Students make good progress in lessons, particularly when they are given practical, active tasks which require them to discuss their ideas together and to work things out for themselves. In a mathematics lesson, for example, when students worked in small groups to solve practical everyday problems, they made very rapid progress in developing their understanding of the importance of clear presentation and accurate explanation. Students are interested and ready to learn and the friendly environment established by teachers develops students' confidence well. Their good relationships with one another enable students to work together effectively in a range of situations, for example, when designing trophies to be awarded locally during summer holiday activities. Such real-life, commercial links ensure that students are motivated because they see the relevance of their learning. The emphasis on relating the curriculum directly to students' experience and local circumstances reflects the impact of the college's technology specialism and rural dimension well. In another example, a food technology project to develop products for sale locally using local produce, effectively, extends their understanding of farming, sustainability and economic awareness.

As they settle into the college, students develop a momentum in their learning and their progress accelerates. From a below average start in Year 9, particularly in their literacy skills, students' attainment in GCSE is average. Attainment is rising across the whole school, including in the sixth form. While currently broadly average overall, attainment last year was above average in AS level and in BTEC National Diploma examinations. College data suggest that the improvement trend is set to continue throughout the college, strengthening students' already good achievement further. Although there are some minor differences, attainment is relatively even across all subjects. Over the last two years, the gap between the attainment of potentially vulnerable groups, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs or who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and other students has decreased. That is largely as a result of the rigorous monitoring of students' attainment to pick up any underachievement as early as possible and the effectiveness of the support provided to boost progress, particularly to raise literacy levels.

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

Students have a good understanding of what they have to do to improve and to reach their target in each subject because they are given regular feedback about the quality of their work. They value the guidance they are given about their choice of subjects. The exceptionally wide range of vocational programmes, run in outstanding industry standard facilities, ensures that students who do not wish to follow academic courses in the sixth form have clear progression route open to them after leaving the college. Throughout their time at West Somerset, students develop personal qualities, such as resilience and initiative, which prepare them well for higher education and the world of work.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good overall, including in the sixth form, and some is of high quality, which gives the college a good basis for improving the existing lessons where teaching is less effective. The college caters well for disabled students and those with special educational needs. These students are taught well, enabling gaps to be closed. Most parents, carers and students are rightly positive about teaching in the college, although a few indicated that there is variation. Inspection evidence supports this view.

Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and use their expertise effectively to plan activities which interest students and successfully develop their knowledge and understanding as well as their personal development. Where teaching is most effective, teachers ensure that the level of challenge is matched closely to students' abilities to increase learning quickly. However, in a few lessons, although the intended learning is identified at different levels, some students are required to complete work which is too easy for them before being given additional challenges, slowing the pace for the most able. By contrast, in a sixth form drama lesson, not a moment was wasted because the teacher's questioning, constantly, challenged all students, requiring them to give their opinions and justify their responses; students' performances showed their ability to incorporate prior learning in a new situation. Skilled questioning is a feature of many lessons, keeping students 'on their toes' while probing and deepening understanding.

Occasionally, including some lessons where learning is good overall, students are passive recipients of new learning, listening to the teacher for extended periods of time. Because information is given in an interesting way, such as visually on the interactive whiteboard, students are motivated to listen and concentrate well. However, in such circumstances, students do not have enough opportunity to test out their thinking through discussion, or to develop initiative by applying their learning in different ways.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' attentive behaviour in lessons is a key factor in the good progress they make. Although a minority of parents and carers indicated in the questionnaire that

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

lessons are disrupted because of inconsiderate behaviour, the college's own surveys, incidents logs, and discussion with students indicate that behaviour is typically good, enabling learning to proceed without interruption. Students are tolerant of one another's views and opinions in lessons. Exclusion rates are low. The college's strategy for managing behaviour is understood by students and they believe that behaviour is generally managed fairly. Behaviour around the site is calm and considerate, as is shown in the respect students have for college facilities. The wide range of activities beyond lessons promoting students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development ensures that most students enjoy their time at the college thoroughly.

Students report that they feel safe in college. That is endorsed by their parents and carers. Students know how to look after their own safety. Bullying of any kind is rare and dealt with rigorously. Nevertheless, some Year 9 students acknowledge that it takes time to become familiar with the size of the college and being around older students.

Attendance is monitored closely and absence followed up routinely. Attendance is in line with the national average overall, but an above-average proportion of students does not attend regularly. That has an adverse impact of the continuity of their learning and uses time within lessons to catch up on work missed. The college is promotes a strong partnership with parents and carers, for example by holding consultation meetings in outlying villages. In spite of improvements over the last year, more remains to be done to reduce the persistent absence of a few students.

Leadership and management

There is a strongly shared college aim to improve the life chances for young people in the locality and to play a full part within the community. The Principal has been relentless in his drive to identify local needs and work in partnership with other organisations to attract funding and develop first-class facilities, which are of benefit to the whole community. That is seen, for example, in the use made of the restaurant, hairdressing and beauty salons, and nursery by the public, supporting families in the area at the same time as giving students real-life experience of hospitality and care services. Apprenticeships, offered in partnership with local industry, add to students' employment opportunities, the success of which is seen in very low numbers of students not entering education, employment or training when they leave West Somerset. Alongside a full range of academic provision, the curriculum is outstanding because it matches students' needs exceptionally well and promotes their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development effectively. As part of its academy development, the college has established a partnership agreement with its feeder middle schools to share professional expertise to raise attainment and promote stronger continuity of learning for students as they join the college. The improvements made since the last inspection, particularly in raising students' attainment, show the college's strong capacity for improvement.

Good assessment and tracking arrangements ensure that equality is promoted and

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

discrimination tackled effectively, as is reflected in the closing of gaps in the achievement of different groups. Subject leaders and teachers are held to account for the achievement of students and for the quality of teaching within their areas. Performance management is rigorous, providing teachers with a regular review of the quality of their work. Strategies to share effective practice are in place, but have not been utilised fully to improve the minority of satisfactory lessons.

The governing body has an accurate knowledge of the college and the challenges it faces. Its procedures are held under constant review to ensure that they are fit for purpose in addressing emerging issues, such as the continuing transition to academy status. All statutory requirements for safeguarding are in place and are monitored by school leaders and the governing body.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

21 June 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of The West Somerset Community College, Minehead TA24 6AY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your college recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up time over lunch to talk to us and to those who completed the questionnaire. We judged West Somerset to be good and that leadership and management is effectively bringing about improvement steadily year on year. That relates to your improving achievement, as well as the excellent college facilities.

You make good progress because you are taught well and choose your options from a very wide range of subjects and courses. Attainment is rising and, by the time they leave the sixth form, some students have made outstanding progress across a wide range of academic and vocational subjects, which means that you have a good platform for later learning and employment. You value the way in which learning is practical and relevant. The other activities in the college help you to enjoy life at West Somerset thoroughly. You told us that you get on well together and feel safe in and around the college. We saw that you have positive attitudes to learning and develop resilience through your time at the college. We recognise that many of you have long journeys each day. Although most of you attend regularly, attendance is too low for a few students and this disrupts their learning.

Staff are ambitious for you and want you to do even better, so that the college is well placed to improve further. In asking for some changes to be made, we have given priority to raising your achievement further by raising the proportion of outstanding teaching. We saw that, sometimes, learning objectives and lesson activities are not matched closely to what you already know. In a few lessons, some time is wasted repeating work you can do already, so we have asked that tasks should be more challenging. We saw that you learn best when you are actively involved, for example, working in groups, and have asked that you should do this more often and that you do not have to sit passively listening for too long. We are confident that you will continue to work hard and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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.**