

Okehampton College

Mill Road, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1PW

Inspection dates 14–15 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- All students make excellent progress from their generally below-average starting points. The proportions gaining at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, are consistently high year on year, and in 2013 well over half of A-level entries were passed at grades A*, A or B.
- Students who are disabled, have special educational needs or who qualify for additional government funding all make excellent progress, with many attaining high grades in GCSE and A-level courses.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and plan work that stretches them. Questioning and marking are used especially well to enable students to understand how to improve their work and make rapid progress.
- There is little variation between subjects in the high quality of the teaching, and any differences in quality that arise are quickly spotted and rectified.
- Students are keen to learn and have the skills to do so quickly. They are enthusiastic about coming to the college and feel happy and safe there.
- Students say there is little bullying and this is confirmed by college records. A recent drive to eliminate the use of racist or homophobic language has been particularly successful.
- The quality of senior and middle leadership is high. Parents, students and staff comment favourably on the improvements that have taken place in recent years. The consistently high quality of teaching across all subjects demonstrates the effectiveness of middle leaders.
- Governors are well informed and are very effective in challenging leaders to improve. They are rightly starting to address issues such as how standards of literacy might be raised across the federation, rather than simply within individual schools.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students benefit from the high quality teaching found across the school and hence their achievement on A-level and other courses is excellent.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the teaching of 44 teachers. About one third of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered reports on the quality of the college's work provided by external consultants and a telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students and members of the governing body.
- The views of 148 parents who submitted them on the Ofsted Parent View website, and of staff who completed a questionnaire, were analysed and taken into account.

Inspection team

Paul Sadler, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paul Holroyd	Additional Inspector
Ann Sydney	Additional Inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional Inspector
Marian Marks	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The college is larger than the average-size secondary school. It serves the town of Okehampton and the surrounding rural area.
- The college is a member of the Dartmoor Federation of Schools, which comprises the college and four small primary schools. The federation is overseen by a single governing body. The federation schools and the college are members of a wider cooperative educational trust which also includes other local schools.
- The college is a member of a Teaching School Alliance, in which local schools work together to improve the quality of their teaching.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is average, while the proportion who are supported through school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs is above average. Most of these students have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties, although some have more profound difficulties such as autism.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students known to be eligible for free school meals and certain other groups.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The college does not use any alternative provision for the education of its students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' note making in subjects such as science by:
 - placing greater emphasis on the teaching of the skills of recording and note making
 - regularly monitoring students' notes for accuracy and completeness.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students start at the college with attainment in English and mathematics that is generally below average; this is especially the case for boys' reading skills. Resources, including the pupil premium and the catch-up funding provided for Year 7 students, are used very well to rectify the deficits.
- Attainment in GCSE examinations has been consistently high when compared to national averages for at least three years. For example in 2013, more than one third of students in Year 11 attained grades A* to C in the English Baccalaureate subjects, compared with just over one fifth of students nationally. These subjects are English, mathematics, at least two science passes, a modern foreign language and a humanities subject.
- In Years 7 to 11, the proportions of students making, or exceeding, the progress expected of them in English and mathematics are well above national averages. As an example, in 2013, well over half of Year 11 students, nearly twice the national average, made better than expected progress in mathematics.
- Whilst achievement is high in almost all subjects, it is especially so in English and mathematics, and in some aspects of science and design and technology, at both GCSE and A level. More able students succeed along with others and usually attain grades A* or A in many subjects at both GCSE and at A level.
- Students make rapid progress both over time, as seen in their work and in data collected by college leaders, and in individual lessons. In a Year 9 food technology lesson where many students had learning difficulties, they rapidly learned how to make pastry by rubbing fat into flour because of the teacher's excellent explanation and the clarity of her demonstration of the technique.
- Students read widely and enjoy using books and the internet as a research tool. In a Year 8 science lesson, students offered to read their work aloud and were clearly proud when the teacher and fellow students praised their efforts.
- The achievement of students in receipt of the pupil premium exceeds national averages, both in terms of their attainment at GCSE and the progress they make in English and mathematics. In 2013 the GCSE results of those students in Year 11 in these two subjects were, on average, about one grade below those of other students in the college. The college's records show that these gaps are closing rapidly among current students, for example to about one half of a grade among the current Year 11.
- Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs make excellent progress because of the high quality support they receive from additional staff. For example, sign language is used to translate lessons for students with impaired hearing.
- The success of all students, whatever their particular needs or starting points, reflects the college's excellent promotion of equality of opportunity.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teachers have high expectations and plan demanding lessons. They amend their teaching as lessons progress, for example in a Year 9 mathematics lesson where the teacher realised students had grasped the basic concept of standard form more quickly than expected. The activity was cut short and a more demanding task was introduced.
- Teachers use questioning very well to find out what students have learned and to make them think. This was observed in a Year 12 drama lesson where questioning was used very effectively to help students improve their delivery of a dramatic monologue.
- In most subjects, including English and mathematics, marking is a particular strength. A consistent approach is used which encourages feedback and discussion between teacher and

student. This contributes well to the very rapid progress made in these subjects.

- In science and a few other subjects, the routine notes and records made by students are sometimes incomplete or of indifferent quality. This is because there is insufficient emphasis on teaching the necessary skills and the quality of the notes is not monitored with sufficient rigour.
- Pupils are set demanding targets and their progress in reaching them is monitored on a monthly basis. The information is shared with students and their parents. Homework is also used very effectively to enhance learning. Parents acknowledge that these factors enable them to be well informed about their child's progress.
- Students with disabilities and/or special educational needs are taught well. Staff have a very good understanding of their individual needs and adapt work to ensure that these are met. Teachers are also highly aware of those students entitled to the pupil premium and ensure that these receive extra help, such as one-to-one teaching, when necessary.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students are proud to be members of the college and have an enthusiasm for learning which inspectors observed in many lessons. They encourage each other and listen to classmates' contributions, such as when evaluating each other's work in physical education. Students say that learning is very rarely, if ever, slowed by the misbehaviour of others. These factors demonstrate the college's excellent promotion of positive relationships.
- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They are polite and friendly to visitors and at all other times such as lunchtime. They are punctual to college and to lessons. Many rely on college buses to travel to and from the college, and have no alternative means of getting there if there are problems such as poor weather. Nevertheless, attendance is above average and is rising.
- Records show that behaviour has been very good over a long period, with very few exclusions. As alternative schools are a long distance away, school leaders work successfully to ensure that students with behavioural difficulties can remain at college.
- Students report little bullying and work actively to challenge any that may occur. Students are rightly proud of a poster campaign they have initiated to challenge any intolerance, such as the use of racist and homophobic language, or any language that is disrespectful to disabled people or other minority groups.
- Students contribute very well to the local community. The Memory Café increases their understanding of the impact of dementia on the elderly and their families. The college has pursued various environmental projects, and produces almost as much electrical energy as it consumes. Such initiatives are used as the basis of some teaching, and contribute well to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities.
- The school's work to ensure that students are safe and secure is outstanding. The many adventurous and outdoor activities are carefully assessed for risk and are led by well-trained staff. This and other features, such as the well-managed and rigorous procedures for child protection, make a strong contribution to students' safety and security.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The Principal and other senior staff give a clear sense of direction that has led to outstanding teaching and student achievement. Senior leaders are both challenged and supported by the governing body, for example to improve A-level results in psychology which were previously a cause for concern. This is an example of the excellent knowledge that leaders and managers have of the college's many strengths and few weaknesses, and of how the latter have been tackled successfully.
- Middle leaders are important lynchpins for the college's success. Excellent subject leadership has led to continuous improvement and very high morale among staff. Many say, 'This is the best school I have ever worked for,' or, 'All staff are committed to the students' success.' The equally

high achievement found in all subject areas is a clear reflection of these high expectations.

- Senior leaders monitor staff performance accurately and effectively. They are aware of the college's isolated location and use many strategies to ensure that staff have access to suitable training, and are able to share ideas with others. These strategies include membership of the teaching school alliance and educational trust, and partnerships with several teacher training institutions.
- The local authority provides appropriately light support for this outstanding college. In the past it has used the expertise of the Principal and other staff to help schools which were experiencing difficulties.
- Data are used very well to monitor students' progress and identify areas for improvement. This has led to highly effective use of resources such as the pupil premium, which are intended to help specific students. As a result, their achievement is outstanding. Reports produced by subject leaders for governors and others are especially informative and contribute well to governors' understanding of students' achievement.
- The sixth form is well led and is attended by the majority of students in Year 11. There are very good links with providers of, for example, specialist agricultural training, to widen students' choices. There are also very effective links with many universities, sporting organisations and the armed forces, so very few former students are not in education, employment or training.
- Parents are very positive about the college. More than nine in 10 would recommend it to other parents. Students also are highly positive about their experience and praise the dedication of senior leaders and other staff.
- The outstanding curriculum offers students courses that they find challenging, and which prepare them very well for the future. The strength of, and emphasis on, high achievement in English and mathematics is a crucial foundation for students' success. Early entry for GCSE examinations has been phased out. The wide range of additional activities in areas such as sport, the performing arts and adventure, is highly valued by students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses, gathered through highly accurate analysis of data and perceptive self-evaluation. They challenge senior leaders to improve further. They have a very good understanding of teachers' performance and of how this relates to their pay and use the performance management system very well to bring about changes in teaching and learning and leadership. They monitor the impact of the use of additional resources, such as the pupil premium and use data effectively in other ways, for example, to improve their understanding of how the college's performance relates to that of schools nationally.
 - Governors meet their statutory responsibilities, such as to keep students safe, very well. They are well trained, for example on safe recruitment of staff. They are beginning, rightly, to use their influence on the Dartmoor Federation to examine issues such as the development of literacy skills across all the schools.

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	113540
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	431467

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	1,319
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Courtney
Principal	Daryll Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2009
Telephone number	01837 650910
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