

West Somerset College

Bircham Road, Alcombe, Minehead, TA24 6AY

Inspection dates 1 October – 2 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Sixth form provision		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Achievement is inadequate. GCSE examination results for Year 11 students have declined over several years and show little sign of improvement.
- Teachers' expectations of what students are able to achieve are too low.
- Students have large gaps in their knowledge due to inadequate teaching over time.
- Students from all year groups underachieve in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Groups of students, including disabled students, those with special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding, are poorly supported and do not make enough progress.
- The most able students are not sufficiently challenged. As a result, they make inadequate progress.
- Marking and feedback provided to students are inconsistent in quality. Too often feedback is superficial or non-existent.
- Students' learning is impeded by persistent, low-level disruption. Some teachers ignore this disruptive behaviour.
- The sixth form is inadequate. The college does not provide adequate provision for students who have not yet achieved a good grade at GCSE level in English or mathematics. Too many students drop out of the sixth form.
- Leaders have been too slow to bring about improvement. They do not monitor the college's work in enough detail. As a result, they are unaware of what is improving and what is getting worse.
- Governance of the college is inadequate. Governors are over-reliant on information from senior leaders. They have failed to respond quickly enough to falling achievement and weak teaching.

The school has the following strengths:

- Students achieve well in art, textiles and physical education due to the good teaching they receive.
- The college provides a wide range of additional activities for students.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out in response to 11 complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. The complaints were deemed to be qualifying complaints and Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector decided that an unannounced inspection of the college should take place to follow up the whole-college issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish the quality of students’ achievement, teaching and leadership and management at the college.
- Inspectors observed 46 episodes of teaching. Six of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. There were also a number of short visits to classes.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders, heads of faculties, members of the governing body and groups of students.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including information on students’ achievement, the college’s self-evaluation and improvement plan, minutes of meetings, and records relating to the monitoring of teaching, behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors took account of 180 responses to the online Parent View survey. There were also a number of written submissions and conversations with staff and, parents and carers.

Inspection team

Simon Rowe, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Alan Hinchliffe

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Julie Miriam

Additional Inspector

Carol Hannaford

Additional Inspector

Roger Pope

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Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- West Somerset College is a larger than average-sized secondary school which admits students from the start of Year 9.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium funding is above average. This is additional government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Acorns Nursery and Pre-School operate from the college site and are managed by the college's governing body.
- The college met the government's floor standards in 2013, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of students access their education at The Taunton Pupil Referral Unit and Northfields Medical Tuition Centre.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Quickly eradicate all inadequate teaching and increase the amount of good teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations of what students are able to achieve
 - use information on students' achievement and individual needs to plan learning activities that enable them to make good progress
 - provide students with consistently high-quality feedback and marking that informs them of how well they have done and the next steps they need to take to improve their learning
 - make sure that students act upon feedback and marking so that they can demonstrate that they know how to improve their learning
 - work alongside the most effective teachers in the school to learn from their practice.
- Raise achievement across the college, particularly in English, mathematics and the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - the most able students are suitably challenged
 - students' individual needs are well known, particularly those who may be disabled, have special educational needs or are eligible for pupil premium funding, to provide them with highly effective support
 - the transition process from Year 8 into Year 9 is strengthened, particularly around understanding students' levels of achievement, so that they are able to commence learning immediately and not waste valuable learning time
 - extra support sessions are rigorously monitored to make sure that students are making faster progress than they would without the extra support
 - high-quality GCSE English and mathematics teaching is provided in the sixth form so that those who do not have a good grade in these subjects are able to achieve one.
- Eradicate the poor behaviour which impedes students' learning.

- Raise students' attendance levels to be at least in line with the national average.
 - Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - training senior and middle leaders to monitor and evaluate robustly the impact of initiatives that they have implemented
 - ensuring that teachers understand and make good use of information on students' individual educational, social and emotional needs
 - specifying how and when leaders will check the progress made towards meeting important targets
 - fully implementing the statutory sixth form study programmes
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders to account for the performance of the college.
 - An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
 - An external review of the college's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
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Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders at the college have been too slow in bringing about improvements. Students' achievement and the quality of teaching are inadequate and show little sign of improving quickly enough.
- Some staff expressed concerns over the quality of leadership at the college. The large majority of parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey feel the college is not well led and managed. Inspectors agree with this.
- Many senior and middle leaders at the college have been appointed with effect from September 2014. There is, however, a lack of urgency to implement new ideas. Leaders do not monitor aspects of the college's work effectively enough to be able to evaluate its impact and to make necessary amendments.
- The information the college has on students' achievement and their academic, social and emotional needs is not comprehensive enough. It is not widely available to staff. As a result, teaching and individual support for students is often poorly matched to their needs.
- The college's self-evaluation is over-generous as leaders and governors do not have a clear understanding of the college's weaknesses. Development plans identify key areas in need of improvement. They do not, however, make clear how and when leaders will check the progress made towards meeting these important targets.
- The targets set for staff are challenging and closely linked to students' achievement and the teachers' standards. However, school leaders have not tackled inadequate teaching effectively.
- During joint observations, inspectors found school leaders' judgements on what constitutes good teaching and how teaching can be improved to be accurate. The best teachers in the college are not used well enough to develop the practice of others. Too much inadequate teaching remains.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the college should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- The range of subjects available at the college is broad and balanced. There is a variety of courses which students particularly enjoy, for example bushcraft and survival skills. Students in this subject were rightly proud of the items they had made. There is, however, a lack of support for students to ensure that each of them has an equal opportunity of success. Many students are not well prepared for the next stage in their education or life in modern Britain because some English and mathematics teaching is poor and the sixth form study programme does not meet students' needs,.
- The college provides a wide range of sessions and additional activities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Of note are drama productions, theatre trips, a wide range of sporting activities and links to the University of New Mexico. Some of this development is provided during the daily mentoring session. Students indicated to inspectors that the quality of these sessions varies depending on the teacher they have.
- A very small number of students are educated at The Taunton Pupil Referral Unit and Northfields Medical Tuition Centre. The college monitors these students well by visiting them regularly. These students do not, however, make enough progress.
- The college has not yet accessed any effective external support to help it to improve.
- The college's safeguarding procedures and checks on staff meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance at the college is inadequate. Governors are over-reliant on information from senior leaders and do not have an accurate view of the strengths of the college and areas in need of improvement. They do not have a clear understanding of students' current achievement or of the quality of teaching. They have been too slow to react to declining examination results and have little knowledge of whether the college is improving. Governors do not hold leaders to account for the performance of the college. They are aware of the procedures to set targets for staff performance but do not know if staff have met these targets. They do not tackle teachers' underperformance effectively. Governors do not have an understanding of how extra government funding is spent and the impact it is having. All safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- When students are not sufficiently challenged by the teaching they receive, they become distracted and the resulting persistent low-level disruption impedes their learning. Students talk over teachers and show a lack of respect for them. Students commented that this disruption usually occurs in lower-attaining groups. Inspectors witnessed poor behaviour in many episodes of teaching during the inspection.
- The proportion of students who receive fixed-term exclusions at the college is much higher than the national average. There is little sign that this is reducing quickly enough.
- Students are, however, usually pleasant and polite around the college site.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement.
- Students understand different types of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet.
- Students indicate that if there is bullying, the college will normally deal with this well. Inspectors agree that this is the case.
- Students' levels of attendance are below the national average and show little sign of improvement. Some groups of students, particularly those eligible for free school meals, have poor attendance. The proportion of students who are persistently absent from school is above the national average.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- Too much teaching is inadequate, including in the sixth form.
- Teachers' expectations of what students are able to achieve are too low. Teachers do not use information on students' achievement or individual needs to plan work which enables them to make good progress.
- Work in many students' books indicates poor progress. Students often lose interest, become bored and stop working. Where poor behaviour occurs, teachers do not follow the college's policy and sometimes ignore the behaviour. This results in valuable learning time being lost.
- The quality of marking and feedback provided to students by their teachers is not good enough. Too often, books are not marked at all. Students are unable to articulate how well they have done or understand what they need to do to improve. When students do receive guidance on how to improve their learning, they are not routinely given the opportunity to act upon it.
- Learning support assistants are often deployed to assist teachers but have no clear guidance on what is required of them. They have limited impact on improving students' learning.
- Where there is good teaching, students show real enjoyment and a sense of pride in what they achieve. Teachers establish high expectations and students show resilience and a determination to succeed. These features are evident in Year 12 mathematics where students are encouraged to solve challenging, complex problems.

The achievement of pupils is inadequate

- The progress students make across a wide range of subjects and year groups, including English, mathematics and the sixth form, is inadequate. Students have large gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The current progress of students, evident in work in books and the college's information, shows that there is little sign of improvement.
- The proportion of Year 11 students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has declined over several years.
- Extra government funding for students eligible for the pupil premium is used for a range of extra support, including small-group work. However, this is not working because students' needs are not well understood and, consequently, the support does not help them to improve. The gap between the attainment of these students in Year 11 and their peers nationally, and within the college, has widened. In 2014, they left over a year behind their peers nationally in English and more than a year and a half behind in mathematics.
- The college does not have a clear understanding of each student's individual achievement or of their academic, social or emotional needs when they start at the college. As a result, many students are not receiving an appropriate level of challenge. Valuable learning time is lost because students get off to a slow start.

- Students took their mathematics GCSE examinations early. This early entry, combined with insufficiently challenging teaching, is contributing to the underachievement of the most able. The college has now ceased entering students early for their GCSE mathematics examinations.
- Teachers do not understand how to adapt their teaching to meet the specific, individual needs of students who are disabled or have special educational needs. As a result, these students make poor progress.
- Extra support to develop students' literacy skills, including a weekly reading group, is not monitored by leaders. They are, therefore, unable to determine the progress students make or to evaluate how effective these sessions are in improving students' literacy skills. The overall achievement of these students, however, remains inadequate.
- Achievement of students in the sixth form is inadequate. Those students who enter the sixth form without a good GCSE grade in English or mathematics are not supported well enough to enable them to achieve this in Years 12 or 13. The progress students make across a wide range of subjects in Year 12 is inadequate, resulting in too many students leaving.
- The majority of the parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey feel that their child does not make good progress at the college. Inspectors agree with this view.
- In a small number of subjects, particularly art, textiles and physical education, students achieve well.

The sixth form provision is inadequate

- The college does not meet the requirements of the 16–19 study programmes. Students who enter the sixth form without a good GCSE grade in English or mathematics are not supported well enough to achieve this. Some students who are on work-related courses do not have a work-experience element.
- Too many students drop out of the sixth form at the end of Year 12 and during Year 13.
- Students underachieve across a wide range of subjects at both AS and A level.
- The quality of teaching over time is inadequate. Teachers do not plan in sufficient detail to meet students' individual needs.
- Students do not use their free time to good effect. Many waste this time and there is a poor work ethic.
- The advice and guidance students receive before entering the sixth form is poor. Too many students are on courses badly matched to their skills, so that they are unable to succeed.
- The advice provided to students prior to leaving the sixth form is of a better quality. Students receive helpful support when applying for places at university.
- The leadership of the sixth form has recently changed. However, the leadership of the sixth form over time is inadequate.

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	136791
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	452876

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,124
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin McNeill
Headteacher	Gaynor Comber
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 June 2012
Telephone number	01643 706061
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Email address	office@westsomerset.somerset.sch.uk

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