

West Somerset College

Bircham Road, Alcombe, Minehead, Somerset TA24 6AY

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| Inspection dates | 17–18 May 2016 |
| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The acting principal's outstanding leadership enabled the college to make systematic improvement since she took up the post in September 2015 and the more rapid improvement over the last three months. The acting principal is supported well by the sponsoring trust and other senior leaders.
- Governors on the new local governing body know the college exceptionally well and provide a very good balance of support and challenge to all college leaders, contributing to the college's recent rapid improvement.
- Pupils mostly conduct themselves well and safely around the college. They move promptly to lessons and arrive ready to learn. They are polite and engaging and a delight to talk to.
- The leadership of key subjects, including English and mathematics, is strong and instrumental in securing the rapid improvements in pupils' achievement since the start of this college year.
- Significant improvements in the quality of teaching enable pupils currently in the college, including those who are disadvantaged, those who have special educational needs or disability and the most able, to now make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils, and learners in the sixth form, are cared for well so that they are safe and can thrive. Good attention is given to each pupil's all-round development. They are prepared well for their next steps on leaving the college and for life in modern Britain.
- Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes in the sixth form now achieve well, particularly those currently in Year 12. They make the most of good opportunities to develop wider employability skills to prepare them well for higher education, apprenticeships, training or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some further improvements in teaching are needed to ensure that more is consistently of a high quality across the full range of subjects.
- The poor behaviour and attendance of a small number of pupils, including the attendance of some in the sixth form, inhibit their learning.

Full report

When West Somerset College was inspected in October 2014, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was subject to monitoring inspections on five occasions. At the previous monitoring inspection, leaders and managers were judged to be taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the attendance of the small group of pupils, and some learners in the sixth form, who are persistently absent, to enable them to make better progress.
- Improve the development of pupils' writing, particularly for boys, across a wide range of subjects to support the very good work in English.
- Improve further the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that more is at the high standard in many subjects by making sure that teachers:
 - take account of the information they have about pupils' and sixth-form learners' current levels of achievement in their planning and teaching
 - challenge pupils and sixth-form learners, at all levels of ability, to do as well as they can
 - provide pupils and sixth-form learners with clear feedback on their work and check that this leads to consolidation of learning and/or further progress.
- Encourage more teachers to build on the significant improvements in pupils' behaviour in lessons to plan learning that is more stimulating and enjoyable and encourage pupils to be more actively involved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since joining the college in September 2015, the acting principal has provided the college with outstanding leadership. Her quietly determined style has won over staff and enabled her to establish an effective, collaborative approach to securing the significant improvements required. This has not been easy, but the acting principal has always been prepared for and capable of taking difficult decisions and confronting those unwilling or unable to take the steps required.
- Despite the long-drawn-out process of becoming part of the Bridgwater College Trust, the acting principal has been supported well by the trust. The trust also took responsibility for financial and other matters to leave the principal free to focus on improving teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The college's senior leadership team has also had a difficult time, with the college going through a long period of uncertainty and significant changes to senior leadership. They have responded well to the challenge and provided the acting principal with good support throughout.
- The quality of subject leadership has improved significantly since the beginning of this college year. The initially inexperienced leaders of English and mathematics have grown into the roles extremely well and are responsible for the significant improvements in teaching and outcomes for pupils. The science subject leader has also taken to the task with enthusiasm and skill and the rewards are now being seen in improving outcomes for pupils. Once their role in being accountable for their subjects was made clear, other subject leaders have worked with energy, enthusiasm and success in raising achievement in their subjects.
- Training for teachers has been well targeted and effective in improving the effectiveness of individual and groups of teachers. Much of the training has been led by college and subject leaders, supported well by the trust and a teaching school alliance.
- Pupil premium funding has been used well and has led to significant closing of achievement gaps. The impact of specific actions on raising achievement and/or improving attendance is evaluated carefully.
- All of this, supported well by the new local governing body, has resulted in an ethos and culture in the college that is much more ambitious and aspirational. This is rubbing off on pupils and parents and enhancing the status of the college in the local community. The increase in the pace of improvement since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2016 is impressive.
- However, more still needs to be done. The quality of teaching is still not at the consistently high quality leaders expect. The behaviour of a small number of pupils needs to improve further, more need to show more positive attitudes to their work and the attendance of a small group of pupils who are persistently absent, including in the sixth form, needs to improve further.
- College leaders ensure a broad and balanced curriculum in Years 9 to 11. A good range of options provides suitable routes for pupils with different needs and aspirations in Years 10 and 11. Despite problems with recruitment, the sixth form provides a good breadth of courses with clear academic and vocational routes.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability ensures that they now achieve well.
- Improvements have been made so that pupils and sixth-form learners are now prepared well for life in modern Britain. A good range of activities promote pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. However, no audit of this has been undertaken leading to some gaps in pupils' understanding of a range of different cultures.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The local governing body was appointed from 1 February 2016. In a short time governors, led well by the chair, have developed an exceptional depth and breadth of understanding of all aspects of the college. They can discuss in detail the differences in the achievement of pupils with special educational needs in English and mathematics, for example.
 - Governors are absolutely clear about what is now working well and what still needs to be improved. They have helped to develop the highly ambitious and aspirational vision for the future of the college.
 - The local governing body has a very good balance of expertise and skills, enabling governors to effectively support and challenge the college's leaders; they do both very well.
 - The trust ensures the effective financial management of the college. The local governing body holds

college leaders to account for the effectiveness of specific funding, such as the use of the pupil premium.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. College leaders have worked hard and effectively to create a culture where all pupils feel safe, are safe and can thrive. Communications with parents have been difficult in the past, but college leaders are relentless in involving parents in any discussions required to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. When necessary, work with external agencies is effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The very large majority of teaching across a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics, is now at least good. This is much improved and can be seen clearly in the positive impact on current pupils' work and progress. The learning expected in lessons and over sequences of lessons is much clearer so that pupils' progress is checked more effectively.
- The much-improved quality of pupils' work in English is testament to the consistently high quality of teaching and excellent subject leadership. Much teaching in mathematics is of a high quality and leads to pupils making at least good progress. The subject leader is forensic and highly effective in identifying individuals and groups of pupils that need focused support or more challenge.
- There is much good teaching in science, but it is not consistently good across the subject. The subject leader is now clear about what improvements are required and has put in place well-targeted training for teachers.
- In some other subjects, such as in art, textiles, music and vocational subjects, strengths in teaching lead to pupils making very strong progress. Pupils' progress in, for example, geography, history and languages, is variable because teaching is not consistently good. College leaders are clear about where teaching needs to improve and actions have already been taken with further actions planned for September.
- Improvements in teaching are largely due to professional development led by college and subject leaders. They have been supported well by others from the trust and from a teaching school alliance.
- College and subject leaders undertake frequent, detailed analysis of pupils' progress. Teachers have access to up-to-date information on pupils' current levels of achievement, combined with their own ongoing tracking of pupils' work. Many, but not all, use this information effectively in their planning and teaching to encourage and support pupils to do as well as they can.
- All teachers provide pupils and sixth-form learners with feedback on their work. This is now much improved and mostly helps pupils to improve their work and make further progress. However, it is not consistently at this high level; in some cases, pupils and learners find it difficult to respond because the feedback lacks clarity and they are not sure what to do.
- English, mathematics and, increasingly, science, undertake diagnostic assessments early in Year 9 to establish what pupils know, understand, and can and cannot do. This is used well to plan teaching and learning. However, the feedback to pupils on their work does not take full account of this diagnostic assessment to provide sharp individualised feedback.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The college's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The gains in pupils' self-confidence and much more positive attitudes to their work over the period of monitoring since the October 2014 inspection are striking. They are responding well to the much more aspirational and ambitious culture established by current leaders and governors.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and a delight to talk to. They are open and genuinely interested in talking about 'their college'. They want to do well and recognise that they have an important role in making this college, and its role in the local community, a place to be proud of. They do not want to accept anything that they feel is not good enough.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They say that incidents of bullying are rare; this is much improved. College leaders' records of incidents confirm this.

- College leaders, teachers and other adults in the college work hard, and effectively, to promote pupils', and sixth-form learners', physical, emotional and mental well-being. Individual pupils are known well and careful and sensitive account is taken of individual personal circumstances.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the college and in most lessons. They move to lessons promptly and arrive on time and ready to learn. The college is calm and well ordered and runs smoothly. This has improved markedly over the period of monitoring since the inspection in October 2014.
- In lessons, pupils mostly do as expected by the teacher and incidents of disruptions to learning are now much less common. This is a marked improvement from what was observed on earlier monitoring inspections.
- Pupils respond to the teachers' expectations. Where these are high and lessons are interesting, pupils respond well and enjoy their learning. However, in a very small minority of lessons, when expectations are low, pupils either behave but show little interest in the work or a small group of pupils will disrupt the learning of others. College leaders are fully aware of this and the actions they have taken have already had a significant impact.
- Pupils say that behaviour in the college has improved and this is most marked this year. This supports college leaders' views that earlier and more recent actions are now making a significant difference.
- Parents' views reflect the difficult journey the academy has been on since being judged to require special measures. There are indications that they are becoming more positive about behaviour in the college and how it is managed.
- Pupils' attendance, for all groups, has improved and continues to improve. College leaders are fully aware that the attendance of a small group of pupils is still not good enough and is having an adverse effect on their achievement and personal development. Case studies for these pupils show clearly that the actions being taken and the support provided by the college are having an impact on improving these pupils' attendance and their achievement, some markedly.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- The outcomes for current pupils are much improved compared to previous outcomes and are now good for all year groups, including in the sixth form, and across a wide range of subjects. The college leaders' analysis, that shows much-improved achievement, is supported well by the quality of pupils' current work.
- The gaps in achievement between groups of pupils, such as between those who are disadvantaged (eligible for support through the pupil premium) and those who are not and between boys and girls, have narrowed significantly. In some cases, such as in English, they have been almost eliminated. Pupils' work in Years 9 and 10 shows that the gaps are closing rapidly in mathematics and are very much reduced in Year 9.
- Most pupils join the college at the start of Year 9. The information provided to the college shows that many pupils do not make the progress in English and mathematics expected by the end of Year 8 and gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, are wide. Pupils' skills in writing, particularly for many boys, are not developed well by the end of Year 8.
- In English and mathematics, the work of pupils currently in Year 9, and many in Year 10, shows that they made strong progress from the start of Year 9 and the gaps in achievement are now almost closed. This improved progress is much more obvious in recent work as improvements in teaching have become well established. The most-able pupils are challenged and do well in English and mathematics.
- Almost half of pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow courses in the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics. These pupils, including many of the most able, make good progress and achieve well; teachers prepare them well for examinations. The progress of the other pupils, who follow a course in core and additional science, is not as strong. These pupils do not have a secure understanding of the key ideas and concepts in science. While they show good understanding of the work they are currently doing, they find it difficult to explain the work in their books from previous lessons.
- Pupils make good progress in a range of other subjects such as, art, textiles, music, religious studies (philosophy, religion and ethics) and vocational subjects. The most-able pupils make good progress in these subjects because the work challenges them to do their best. Pupils' progress in geography and history is variable and is less good in languages. The college leaders are clear about where pupils' achievement needs to improve.

- Those pupils who have special educational needs or disability mostly make good progress as a result of good provision and strong leadership. Their progress is currently better in English than in mathematics. However, the support team track the progress of individual pupils well and the support in place is now making a difference. The effectiveness of the work of teaching assistants is variable, as seen, for example, with a group of Year 9 learners in a product design lesson with three assistants. Some still do too much for individual pupils and do not develop their independence sufficiently. The best use a well-considered and effective balance of support and challenge, often using questioning well to develop pupils' thinking and understanding.
- Pupils' skills in writing are developed well in English to overcome weaknesses when pupils enter the college, as seen in many pupils' work. This is currently not supported well in other subjects, including in geography and history. In these subjects, examples of high-quality writing do not receive the praise deserved and weaknesses in writing are often not commented on.
- Pupils reaching the end of Year 11 are now much better prepared for the next stage in their education or training, whether in the college sixth form or elsewhere. They have higher levels of achievement in English and mathematics, as well as other subjects, and greater confidence and self-esteem.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The very large majority of learners complete their study programmes and achieve well. College leaders' analysis of achievement is accurate and supported well by the quality of learners' work.
- Sixth-form leaders undertook a detailed and perceptive analysis of why the sixth form provision was previously so poor. They have systematically implemented changes that have led to much-improved provision and outcomes for learners and are now well placed to build on the improvements made so far. Learners' confidence in the quality of teaching and leadership is much improved and key to rebuilding stronger sixth-form numbers.
- The achievement of learners currently in Year 12 is good across a very wide range of subjects and very strong in subjects such as art, photography, textiles and many of the vocational subjects. Achievement in all subjects is at least in line with the national average; no subjects are weak. The previous wide variation in some subjects in the achievement of learners with similar starting points is much reduced.
- Learners in Year 13 are from the group that achieved poorly in their GCSE examinations in 2014. Their current achievement across a wide range of subjects is at least in line with the national average and strong in photography and textiles.
- Learners' achievement on level 2 and level 3 vocational subjects is strong. There is good progression from level 2 to 3 in those courses that offer this. All learners on vocational courses have appropriate external work experience to help them develop wider skills and a deeper understanding of the vocational area.
- Learners who need to continue with English and/or mathematics to achieve a GCSE at grade C or above make good progress as a result of high-quality teaching and support. Learners often work in their vocational groups to support each other and to enable them to use helpful contexts for the work.
- Learners are much more positive about the quality of teaching in the sixth form and about the support they receive. This can be seen in the improvements in the quality of their work over the year. They report that much better use is made of the time in lessons, and this was seen in the lessons visited as part of this inspection and the earlier monitoring inspection. They are provided with feedback on their work that gives them a more accurate view of their progress and achievement, as well as challenging them to do better.
- All sixth-form learners have an interview to determine the most suitable non-qualification activities that will help them to develop their wider personal, social and employability skills. There is a good balance of short work placements, visits, talks and presentations from visitors, voluntary, community and charitable work, and helping out in the lower school.
- Progression to higher education is very high. Eighty five per cent of Year 13 learners in 2015 secured places on their first-choice course in their first choice university. Many of the others will take up an apprenticeship.
- Learners are mostly cared for well and they know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. The poor attendance of a small group limits their progress, although leaders make contact with parents to make sure that they know where the learners are and that they are safe. College leaders are fully aware that this is an area for improvement. From September, the much-improved sixth-form base and IT facilities are designed to make it easier for learners to work in college when not in lessons.

- Planned sixth-form numbers for next year look much stronger. Pupils currently in Year 11 are confident that they will receive good teaching in the sixth form. Despite a significant fall in numbers at the start of 2015/16, the college offers a broad and attractive curriculum with a good range of routes for learners to choose from. The guidance learners receive prior to starting 16 to 19 courses is full and impartial; the very large majority are now on suitable programmes. This is much improved.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 136791 |
| Local authority | Somerset |
| Inspection number | 10011379 |

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.

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 13–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 858 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 216 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Wendy Dick |
| Acting Principal | Jane Aplin |
| Telephone number | 01643 706061 |
| Website | www.westsomersetcollege.org |
| Email address | enquiries@westsomersetcollege.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 1–2 October 2014 |

Information about this school

- West Somerset College is an average-sized secondary school that admits pupils from the start of Year 9.
- The college was a converter academy when it was inspected and placed in special measures in October 2014. The college became part of the Bridgwater College Trust, a multi-academy trust, on 1 February 2016. At that point, the college's status changed from a converter academy to a sponsored academy. The arrangements for the governance of the college changed. Overall responsibility now lies with the Bridgwater College Trust Board. A local governing body has responsibility for most aspects of the college's work, other than currently for finance.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is above average. This is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority. The proportion of pupils who have special education needs or disability is above the national average.
- The current acting principal, who took up post in September 2015, will lead the college until a new principal takes up post in September 2016.
- The college is supported by the Taunton Teaching Alliance.
- The college does not use any alternative provision.
- Acorns Nursery and Pre-School operate from the college site and are managed by the governing body.
- The college met the government's floor standards in 2015, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held discussions with the college's acting principal, senior leaders and subject leaders. They also met formally with two groups of pupils, one from Year 9 and one from Year 10. Inspectors also had informal discussions with many pupils and learners in the sixth form around the college site at break and lunchtimes and at the end of the college day. At the time of the inspection, Year 11 learners were preparing for GCSE examinations.
- Inspectors met with seven members of the local governing body, including the chair, who also represented the trust.
- Inspectors visited lessons in Years 9 and 10 and in the sixth form, many with college leaders. In lessons, they looked at pupils' work and talked with them about it.
- Inspectors also looked at a wide range of work for pupils they selected from Years 9 and 10.
- The responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were too few to be taken into account.

Inspection team

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| James Sage, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Malcolm Davison | Ofsted Inspector |
| Benjamin Houghton | Ofsted Inspector |
| Nann Stimpson | Ofsted Inspector |

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