



Heathfield Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114587
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279418
Inspection dates 30 November 2005 to 1 December 2005
Reporting inspector David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Cade Street
School category	Community		Old Heathfield
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8RJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01435 866066
Number on roll	1400	Fax number	01435 867115
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Alison Diog
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr Alan Powell

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 30 November 2005 - 1 December 2005	Inspection number 279418
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Heathfield Community College is a large comprehensive school serving a wide, semi-rural area. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is about average. The school is one of the few in the country to be designated as a specialist school for both visual and performing arts.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Heathfield Community College is a good school with many outstanding features. The school also evaluates its overall effectiveness as good but is too modest in its assessment of several areas of its work.

Pupils make good progress and achieve well, particularly in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This is a result of consistently good teaching and excellent care, guidance and support by a committed staff, working in partnerships with others. Many pupils with learning difficulties make excellent progress. The vast majority of pupils enjoy their education and are enthusiastic learners. This is reflected in above average levels of attendance and good standards of behaviour. Despite its large size, the school provides a very friendly and safe environment for learning. The curriculum is very well matched to pupils' needs and is enriched by an excellent programme of visits and activities outside normal school hours. Pupils and the wider community have benefited from the school's specialist designation for the visual and performing arts.

The school is very well led and managed. Governors provide good support and meet nearly all their statutory obligations. The school has a good understanding of its relative strengths and weaknesses and has clear strategies to bring about improvement. Some of these are very recent and are yet to have a full effect on improving teaching and raising standards and achievement. Although teaching is good overall there is variation in quality between subjects and between teachers in the same subject. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection and managers are very capable of bringing about further improvement. Overall the school provides very good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that provision in the sixth form is good. Standards are well above average and students make good progress relative to their prior attainment, with a very high proportion going on to higher education. There is a low drop out rate from courses. The good teaching is underpinned by very effective advice and guidance from teachers and tutors. As a result, students are well informed about their progress and know how to improve their work. There is an excellent range of advanced level courses and extra curricular activities on offer. There is a strong programme of personal education and careers guidance and students feel confident and well prepared for employment and higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching and learning by sharing the excellent practice that already exists in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average. They make good progress in the first three years of school and achieve standards at the end of Key Stage 3 that are above average in English, mathematics and science. They continue to make good progress in Key Stage 4 and achieve GCSE results that are well above average. There is no significant underachievement by any particular group of pupils and the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties is outstanding. Standards achieved in the sixth form are well above average and students make progress at least in line with expectations based on their prior attainment. Unconfirmed data for 2005 show an improvement in English results at Key Stage 3. GCE advanced level results also improved. However, there was a fall in the proportion of pupils attaining five or more higher grade GCSEs, although it still remains well above average. The school sets challenging targets and these are generally met. Overall, inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that learners' achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's support for the personal development and well-being of pupils is a very considerable strength with all aspects being at least good and several that are outstanding. The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and have excellent attitudes towards learning. This is reflected in above average attendance and low rates of exclusion. Pupils of all ages feel very secure in school and adopt safe practices. There are excellent systems in place, including the use of pupil mentors, to deal promptly with the rare cases of bullying or harassment. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is generally excellent. Some low level disruptive behaviour occurs in a small minority of lessons, generally where tasks and activities are not sufficiently interesting or challenging.

Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's specialist status is reflected in pupils' involvement in a wealth of cultural activities, several with a multicultural dimension, and their access to an increasing range of performing and visual arts. Pupils are helped to develop a strong sense of moral and social responsibility through the curriculum and other aspects of the school's work. Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory but inhibited by the lack of a daily collective act of worship and limited time for spiritual reflection.

There is a very strong encouragement for pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. The school has gained the Sportsmark and Silver Healthy School awards. Pupils welcome the improved range of healthy eating options recently introduced in the school canteen and there is a good take up of after school clubs involving physical activities.

Pupils develop work place skills well through a well organised work experience programme, work related learning and enterprise initiatives. They make an outstanding contribution to the school and to the wider community with mutually beneficial results.

They benefit from the very strong links that have been developed with businesses and other schools, including a multicultural inner city school in London.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form, with many strengths and some features that are outstanding. However, there is variation in the quality of teaching between subjects and between teachers in the same subject. Lesson activities are usually very carefully planned, with a sequence of short, challenging activities that develop pupils' knowledge and skills systematically. Teachers generally have very good expertise in their subjects. They are good at checking to see if anyone is having difficulties and provide additional help or explanations where necessary. A wide range of resources is often used, stimulating pupils' interest. In several subjects, excellent marking of coursework identifies what has been done well and exactly what to focus on to make improvements. Occasionally, the slow pace of a lesson, work set at inappropriate levels of difficulty for all in the class, or undemanding expectations mean that learning is satisfactory rather than good. In the outstanding lessons, pupils make rapid progress through a sequence of tasks that often involve problem solving. Teachers are particularly good at giving oral feedback. For example, in an excellent drama lesson, pupils picked up the teacher's evaluative comments on their group improvisations and made some very perceptive, reflective observations about each other's performance.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is exceptionally well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils in Key Stage 4 have a wide range of options, including vocational courses. The most able pupils are given opportunities in some subjects to take GCSE examinations early and to start work at AS level before they join the sixth form. Highly successful courses provided in conjunction with further education colleges and local employers enable pupils to pursue their interests in areas such as catering and horticulture. There is an excellent range of advanced level courses available to sixth form students. The school has been very responsive in tailoring the choice of courses to individual students' preferences, both at GCSE and in the sixth form. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is exceptionally good throughout the school. The curriculum is further enriched through a wide range of clubs and other out-of-school activities, especially in sports, and through the many trips on offer, including several opportunities to travel abroad. The school's specialist status has had a major impact on extending the provision for performing and visual arts, much of which is outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The standard of care, guidance and support is outstanding and this has a very strong influence on pupils' attitudes to learning. The monitoring and support for pupils' social development, particularly for those who have behavioural and learning difficulties, is excellent. There are rigorous systems for tracking pupils' academic progress although there is some variation in how effectively teachers use the information obtained to plan work that challenges all ability groups in younger age classes.

The school's arrangements for child protection are very secure. The school has very good measures in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. Links with other educational centres, specialist services and community groups to support vulnerable pupils are exceptionally good. The school provides excellent support for pupils when they transfer from primary school, make option choices or enter the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is very well led and managed. The school has carried out a thorough analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, drawing on the views of pupils, parents and others involved with the school. It has used this analysis to put in place strategies to bring about further improvement. There is a very clear sense of direction with a strong focus on inclusion and equal opportunities, raising standards and improving the quality of care. The school works very effectively with the local authority and a range of other agencies to promote high quality education and care. Governors provide good support and discharge their statutory responsibilities well, although the requirement to hold a daily collective act of worship is not fully in place. They are provided with good information on which to base decisions and develop a good understanding of the school through, for example, their involvement with the school council and links with subjects. There are very robust systems in place to monitor how the school uses its funding and very efficient use is made of available resources.

Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection and the school has a strong capacity to make further improvements. Standards have continued to improve, the curriculum has been broadened to better meet the needs of learners and the school has been awarded specialist status for the visual and performing arts. Since his appointment in 2004, the headteacher has introduced more rigorous systems of performance management and given a sharper focus to the role of heads of department in monitoring teaching and learning and planning for improvement. There is now some excellent middle management practice but this is not yet universal and these recent measures have not had time to take full effect on improving teaching and raising standards and achievement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Heathfield Community College Cade Street Heathfield East Sussex TN21 6RJ

15 December 2005

Dear Pupils and Students

We were very pleased to meet and talk to so many of you when we inspected your school recently. Your contributions helped to give us a better understanding of your school. We all enjoyed our visit and we appreciated the friendly and courteous welcome you gave us. We agree with the view of many of you that Heathfield Community College is a good school with many outstanding features.

What we liked most about your school:

- the good progress you make in lessons
- your enjoyment of school, good attendance and generally good behaviour
- the good teaching and learning that takes place
- the way you make a positive contribution to the community
- the way you are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles
- the wide choice of subjects you are offered at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and the wide range of activities you take part in after school
- the excellent care, support and guidance you receive
- the good management and leadership of the school

What could be improved

We feel teaching and learning could be made even better if teachers were given more opportunities to learn from each other about what makes an excellent lesson.

We believe the headteacher, governors, teachers and other staff in the school will continue to make improvements and we hope you will all contribute to them and benefit from them.

With our thanks and best wishes,

Yours faithfully,

David Butler HMI Lead Inspector