

Uplands Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114591
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326044
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Humphries HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,055
Sixth form	194
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Gordon
Principal	Jayne Edmonds
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	October 2007
School address	Lower High Street Wadhurst East Sussex TN5 6AZ
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons and a parents' evening, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the college's work, and looked at its development plan, its analyses of students' progress and attainment, and other key aspects of its performance. Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 157 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- trends in students' achievement and attendance since 2006
- students' contribution to decisions affecting their lives in the college
- the impact of leadership and management, focusing particularly on how well the college has built on its previously good performance.

Information about the school

Uplands Community College is an oversubscribed 11–18 comprehensive school serving the village of Wadhurst and the surrounding rural area. The college also provides nursery and childcare provision throughout the day for children aged 2 to 4 and an after-college club for children aged 2 to 11. The college has been awarded specialist status in technology and the performing arts with English and is designated as a High Performing Specialist School. The great majority of students come from White British backgrounds.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

- Uplands Community College is a successful and forward thinking school. The clear and determined leadership of the Principal, who is well supported by a committed team of staff and a strong governing body, has been a key factor in driving through improvements since the last inspection. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development and, in particular, their judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and perceptive. Any signs of underperformance are followed up quickly and tackled effectively. Consequently, the college's performance has improved significantly since the last inspection. More of its work is now outstanding and there is a rising trend in students' attainment.
- One parent commented that 'I have never come across any school that has such a positive, encouraging and supportive approach.' This aptly summarises the values which pervade the college's work and encourage students to develop self-confidence and an impressive sense of personal responsibility. Students enjoy their education, want to learn and are eager to contribute to the life of the college and the wider community, although a few are absent from college on too many occasions.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and improving because of astute monitoring by senior leaders and a sharp focus on improving classroom practice. There are some outstanding lessons which are characterised by imaginative and purposeful teaching, underpinned by varied and challenging activities and regular, constructive feedback which enhances students' learning. However, this excellent practice is not yet embedded consistently across the college.
- The sixth form has become an integral part of the college, with sixth formers playing an increasingly important role in supporting younger students in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Work in key areas such as assessment and the monitoring of students' progress has been successfully aligned with the effective approaches which have been developed in the main college and this has improved the quality of provision in the sixth form.
- Children in the 'Sticky Fingers' nursery benefit from a high level of care which is provided in a safe and secure environment. They develop good personal, social

and emotional skills, although more systematic monitoring of their learning is needed to ensure that their communication, literacy and numeracy skills develop at the same rate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons, building on the excellent classroom practice which has already been developed, to establish greater consistency in two key areas:
 - providing varied learning activities which motivate and challenge students
 - providing students with regular and constructive feedback which helps them to improve their learning.
- Improve overall attendance rates by ensuring that strategies to improve attendance are more sharply focused on students for whom persistent absence is a concern.
- Monitor the progress of children in the nursery more systematically in order to develop a sharper understanding of their development needs and increase their rate of learning.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

- Overall, students make good progress in lessons. They are keen to learn and concentrate well, working cooperatively when required and responding enthusiastically to stimulating work and opportunities to think for themselves. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive well targeted support in lessons and this ensures that they make good, and in some cases exceptional, progress. Consequently, the results that students achieve in GCSE examinations are above average and rising, with consistently strong performance across most subjects, including English, mathematics and science. While girls attain better results than boys, the difference is broadly in line with the national picture.
- While the great majority of students enjoy their education and achieve well, overall attendance levels are broadly average. This is because the persistent poor attendance of a comparatively small number of students and family holidays taken during term time affect the overall attendance rate.
- Students' good behaviour in most lessons makes a valuable contribution to their learning. Occasionally, when lessons are less interesting and challenging, a few students lose motivation and do not behave so well. There is a calm and cooperative atmosphere at breaks and lunchtimes, with students responding positively and responsibly to the college's policy of allowing open access to many of the college buildings. Students demonstrate a very strong sense of right and wrong and a keen awareness of social responsibility. One student said, 'You can leave your bag anywhere in the college and nobody will take

anything.'

- Students make an exceptional contribution to the life of the college, responding enthusiastically to opportunities to shape decisions about its future. For example, representatives of Student Action Groups attend staff training days and contribute to the formulation of the college improvement plan. Students are very perceptive about the differences between their own and others' cultures and have a clear understanding of the differences between their own community and more diverse social and ethnic contexts. They show a mature interest in spiritual, moral and ethical issues and are able to discuss and empathise with the personal feelings of others. Students' maturity and sense of personal responsibility are also evident in the ways in which they approach and manage the risks that they face in their lives and in their extremely positive response to the college's extensive range of initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

- Teaching is often good and sometimes outstanding. In general, it is well planned with a clear focus on what students are expected to learn. Positive relationships between students and staff and the thoughtful deployment of teaching assistants to provide effective classroom support help to establish a productive and purposeful atmosphere in many lessons. At its best, teaching includes a good blend of pace and challenge with opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on their learning, often in groups or pairs. Less successful lessons tend to lack challenge and variety and consequently students occasionally lose motivation, for example, when they are working predominantly from a textbook.

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

- The curriculum is well matched to students’ needs and aspirations and enriched by imaginative use of the college’s specialist status. In Key Stage 4, a good range of GCSE subjects is complemented by an increasing number of vocational courses including the 14–19 Diploma provided through a partnership with local colleges. The formal curriculum is enhanced by an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities including booster classes, ‘twilight provision’ for additional examination courses and trips and visits, both within Britain and to destinations as diverse as Iceland, Malawi and Morocco or Venice, and links with Ukraine and Burundi.

- The college has developed a comprehensive system for tracking progress and setting targets for individual students and particular groups. This is used well to identify any signs of underachievement so that additional support can be provided for individual students. Increasingly, the tracking system is being used to inform intervention work by tutors and senior pastoral staff, as well as outside agencies. Senior leaders are working hard to improve teachers’ use of assessment and there are examples of strategies such as questioning and peer assessment being used very effectively to probe and develop students’ knowledge and understanding. The marking of extended pieces of work, including projects and coursework, is often thorough and detailed, but regular and constructive feedback on students’ everyday written work is not provided consistently across the college.

- Excellent support, guidance and care is greatly enhanced by the Opportunities After School In School (OASIS) programme which identifies, monitors and supports potential underachievers, especially more vulnerable students and those exhibiting challenging behaviour. The programme makes highly effective use of a variety of external agencies and a range of intervention strategies. More generally, there are excellent transition arrangements for new students and students throughout the college benefit from high levels of academic guidance and pastoral care.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

- The senior leadership team, supported by middle leaders, have established a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the college – ‘preparing for a future we cannot imagine’. They understand what the college needs to do to achieve this and demonstrate the drive and determination to succeed. Planning and self-evaluation are thorough, drawing on a wide range of information to focus on key improvement priorities. Underperformance is tackled effectively so that

students' achievement is good and rising.

- The college has very robust procedures to ensure the safety of its students and all of the current legal requirements are fully met. Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are accorded a high priority. The college has been extremely successful at retaining students at risk of exclusion and supporting those with complex learning needs and disabilities. Consequently, these students make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress.
- The governing body has a thorough understanding of the college's work and performance. It has shown great strength of character in eradicating a substantial inherited budget deficit, while maintaining an unswerving commitment to improving the quality of provision and raising achievement. The college now provides excellent value for money.
- The college works hard to build relationships with parents and carers and to involve them in their children's learning and in the wider life of the college through an extensive programme of consultation, including focus groups on key issues and regular surveys of their views. Despite this, a small minority of parents consider that communication with the college is not always effective. Outstanding partnerships with a range of outside organisations are used very successfully to support students' learning and well-being.
- The college has made good progress on the promotion of community cohesion, auditing the work that it currently undertakes and seeking to build on its strong international links with many countries. It is currently planning more systematically to provide a greater range of opportunities for students to work with others from diverse ethnic and faith groups in different parts of the country.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Children in the ‘Sticky Fingers’ nursery are happy and settle quickly into everyday routines. They adopt healthy habits, such as washing their hands before handling food and develop good personal and social skills. The regular and systematic assessment and recording of children’s progress in relation to the early learning goals is at an early stage of development. Consequently, planning for learning does not always build systematically on what children already know, do and understand.

- Since September 2008, the child care manager has worked hard to implement the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and deal with the issues arising from the nursery’s last inspection. While significant progress has been made, there are areas where good practice has not become securely embedded and monitoring and evaluation procedures are at an early stage of development. Staff in the nursery work together well and have built positive links with parents and carers.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

Sixth form

- Sixth formers are extremely positive about the education they receive. They appreciate extensive opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities and support the work of the main part of the college. Sixth formers organise charity fundraising activities, provide valuable help and support for younger students and contribute to improvements in college life, for example through the development of a rugby academy. In this lively and purposeful environment, sixth form students develop good social and personal skills and become confident and articulate young men and women. Effective teaching enables sixth formers to make good progress. Most are highly motivated and respond well to opportunities to explain their views and discuss their work.

- Good leadership and management have been key factors in establishing the sixth form as an integral part of the college. Systems to monitor students’ progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the sixth form have built successfully on the good practice already established in the main college. Underperformance in a small number of subjects has been tackled successfully and consequently, after a slight dip in 2008, attainment is rising. The curriculum is reviewed regularly to ensure that it meets students’ needs and guidance and support is targeted carefully to prepare students for examinations and university applications. Retention rates from Year 11 are high and very few students leave at the end of Year 12.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

- The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires in the short time available during this unannounced inspection was broadly in line with the average for secondary schools. The views they expressed were mostly very positive, particularly in relation to children's safety, their enjoyment of college and preparation for the future, and the leadership and management of the college. The great majority of parents were also very positive about their children's progress and how well their individual needs were met. Inspectors agree with these views.
- A small but significant minority of parents expressed concern about the space available in the college canteen. The college and the inspection team recognise that the present facility is limited, but inspectors do not feel that this has a significant impact on the extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles.
- A small but significant minority of parents expressed concern about communication with the college. Inspectors recognise that any lapse in communication is a concern for those involved, but consider that the college works hard to communicate with parents and seek and act on their views.

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. In 2007/8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007/8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007/8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
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. In 2007/8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



6 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Uplands Community College, Wadhurst, East Sussex, TN5 6AZ

The inspection team enjoyed listening to your views when your college was inspected on 4–5 March 2009. Many of your parents and carers completed a questionnaire to let us know how they felt about the college. I hope you will talk to them about the inspection report because it explains what the college does well and how it can become even better.

Uplands is a good and improving college. Some of its work is outstanding. You told us that staff provide you with excellent support, care and guidance, that you enjoy learning and make the most progress when you are given challenging and interesting work. It was very encouraging to hear how well you work together and treat each other with trust and respect. We were impressed by your understanding of other cultures and faiths and by your outstanding contribution to the life of the college.

You make good progress in lessons and the college examination results are above the national average in many subjects. This is because teaching is good overall and because most of you work hard and behave well. One of the main reasons why your college is successful is that it is well led. The Principal is determined to improve the college further and she is supported by a committed team of staff and governors. We have asked them to do three things:

- Make sure that there are more outstanding lessons with varied learning activities and regular and constructive feedback on your everyday work to help you make the maximum progress.
- Improve the attendance of students for whom persistent absence is a concern. These students need to play their part, because poor attendance impedes their progress and affects their future.
- Keep careful track of the progress of children in the nursery so that they learn more quickly.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

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