

The West Somerset Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123877
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328008
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1305
Sixth form	351
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin McNeill
Headteacher	Nick Swann
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Bircham Road Alcombe Minehead TA24 6AY
Telephone number	01643 706061
Fax number	01643 705700

Age group	13–18
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Inspection number	328008

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

The West Somerset Community College is a specialist technology college located in the seaside town of Minehead. It is a larger than average size upper college receiving students from three middle schools. Students are drawn from a wide catchment area which includes the town and surrounding villages. Most are from White British backgrounds and almost all are fluent in English. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, although a few have quite complex needs associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties or an autistic spectrum disorder. While the percentage of students eligible for free college meals is lower than the national average, the college's catchment area includes areas of significant deprivation. The college has its own farm unit and provides a range of other vocational courses, many of which have been introduced in the current academic year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The West Somerset Community College provides a good quality of education. A caring and inclusive ethos is at the heart of the college, as described by one parent: 'The care and attention and support of the teachers is exceptional and is helping my son to make good progress in his learning.' The curriculum is outstanding and is well matched to the wide range of students' capabilities and interests. The provision of vocational courses is exceptional and has had a marked impact on raising the aspiration and achievement of students who have previously found it difficult to engage with learning. The college has been very successful in using its specialist technology status to build excellent links with the local community and other partners to extend the courses of study available for students.

Good teaching promotes students' positive attitudes to learning and ensures they make good progress. Students enter the college with attainment that is below average and leave with standards which are broadly average. Results in GCSE, A-level and vocational examinations have fluctuated in recent years and there has been underperformance in some subjects, especially in English. Current evidence confirms a trend of improving attainment as new courses have become established and students are given better guidance in choosing suitable courses. The college has also taken robust action to improve standards in English and students' achievement in this subject is now good overall. However, the highly effective approaches employed by the English department to raise attainment in literacy are not yet established in subjects across the college. As a result, inconsistency in progress remains, especially for some lower attaining students.

Students' personal development and behaviour are good. Respectful relationships between staff and students underpin the calm and mature atmosphere in the college. Students feel their opinions are valued and they make an outstanding contribution to the college and to their local community. Attendance is satisfactory and the college has introduced a range of strategies which have resulted in a marked reduction in absences during the current academic year. Excellent links have been established with other agencies to support the high quality of care. Students' academic guidance is satisfactory. The college has recently introduced changes to its pastoral system to help identify at an early stage students who are underperforming and to give them appropriate support. The full impact of these changes has yet to be realised and evaluated. Parents hold overwhelmingly positive views about the work of the college. They are particularly pleased with the high level of care and the way the college is led and managed. A few parents raised concerns about the setting and marking of homework. Inspectors agree that marking is not used consistently across subjects to help students improve their work. A few parents and students also reported that past staffing difficulties, particularly in English, had affected students' progress. This was recognised by the college and staffing is now more stable.

The college is well led and managed. The principal and senior leaders provide a clear vision for the college and they are passionate about raising its performance. As one parent commented, 'The ambitious leadership of the college is most refreshing.' The college has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. Several positive changes have been introduced recently although some have yet to demonstrate their full impact on raising standards. Given the significant improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection, and the recent impact of strategies to raise standards, the college demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is underpinned by a good curriculum. The excellent range of vocational courses, backed by new facilities, has led to an increase in the recruitment and retention of students. Students' achievement is good, although there is some variation in attainment between different subjects. Particular strengths include mathematics, art and physical education. Standards in science and provision for the performing arts have been areas of concern and the college is taking effective steps to improve them. Several of the vocational courses have only been introduced since September 2008, although early indications are that students are achieving well. Teaching and learning in sixth form lessons are good, and at times outstanding. Students' progress is checked closely and the tutorial system has been strengthened recently to improve individual academic guidance and to provide early support for those not working to potential. Leadership of the sixth form is good, with a clear vision for its future direction. Recent and planned innovations in its management and organisation are ambitious and realistic for the needs of the students. This has been evident in raising the aspirations of many students towards higher education, as shown by recent Oxbridge entry successes. Sixth form students play a full part in the life of the college and the wider community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by extending the use of literacy strategies in subjects across the college, particularly to support lower attaining students.
- Ensure marking is used consistently across the college to help students improve their work.
- Monitor the new arrangements for academic guidance to ensure they are successful in raising students' attainment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the college in Year 9 with standards that are below average. They make good progress and by the end of Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form, they achieve standards which are broadly in line with the national average. Results in GCSE examinations have fluctuated in recent years and while students consistently make good progress in mathematics, progress in English has been weaker. The college has taken steps to improve underperformance in English which have had a positive impact. Standards in this subject are now in line with the national average and students' achievement is good overall. However, the highly effective approaches employed by the English department to raise attainment in literacy are not yet used consistently across the college. As a result, some lower attaining students make satisfactory, rather than good, progress in developing their literacy skills. The recent broadening of the curriculum in the sixth form has enabled students with a wide range of capabilities and interests to engage in learning and to achieve well.

The college keeps detailed information to track the performance of different groups in the college. In recent years, lower attaining boys have underperformed. However, steps have been taken to raise the attainment of this group and their progress is now satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to the varied and individually tailored support they receive. The wide range of practical and vocational courses provided help students with behavioural difficulties and those at risk of disaffection to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students clearly enjoy college and describe it as 'warm and friendly'. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is generally good, with students showing respect towards each other and college facilities. Attendance is satisfactory and shows an improving trend due to the college's strong focus on reducing absences. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They consider different cultures, religions and moral and social issues, such as poverty, during 'enrichment' lessons. Students have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle as shown by their high participation in physical activity and their commitment to healthy eating and drinking. They show a strong understanding of the dangers of smoking, substance abuse and sexual health risks. Students are highly aware of safety issues and use equipment sensibly in practical and vocational lessons. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding. They express their views with confidence and participate fully in decision-making, for example through the college council where they have been involved in reviewing college policies, secured increased provision of water machines and instigated improvements to the college's toilets and computer facilities. Students contribute to the wider community through, for example, participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, raising funds for charities and organising environmental projects. Good opportunities to develop leadership skills, together with the wide range of vocational courses, ensure that students are well prepared for their future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Well-established classroom routines and respectful relationships between staff and students underpin the positive environment for learning. Typically, lessons are well planned and contain a variety of activities which capture students' interest. Lesson objectives are shared with students and appropriate work is set which takes close account of the different ability levels of groups and individuals. The pace of lessons is generally brisk and teachers use questioning well to check that students understand the purpose of the lesson. Occasionally, lessons focus too much on the activity, rather than on what students are expected to learn, which limits progress. Marking and assessment are used well in many lessons to help students improve their work. However, the use of marking is inconsistent and sometimes teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the presentation of students' work or ensure suggested improvements are followed up.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Curricular provision is outstanding throughout the college in its breadth, balance and relevance. The expansion of vocational courses complements the academic subjects and both are seen as of equal status. The college's technology status has strongly aided the establishment of new courses. New vocational facilities and the development of land-based subjects add a richness to the curriculum, which has proved popular with students. The college has established excellent links with the local community and extends the curriculum beyond the classroom through the use of the local environment and countryside. For example a Year 9 performance of *The Tempest* on the local beach brought Shakespeare alive for the students who were involved. Breadth is

added to the curriculum through a good range of enrichment activities, which includes international links with a tea producer in Uganda, trips to Germany and France, and extra-curricular clubs and sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Effective procedures for safeguarding students are in place, supported by clear child protection arrangements and thorough recruitment practices to ensure staff are suitable to work with children. Students report that the rare incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. The college has established very close links with other agencies, such as the local health service, education welfare service and police, to support students' well-being. This collaborative approach has been particularly successful in improving students' attendance. Provision to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Carefully structured individual programmes have helped to reduce exclusions and enable several students with complex learning needs to be included in lessons. Transition arrangements are good, although for a few students there is insufficient clarity about the routes leading on from vocational courses to employment and further training. The college has introduced changes to its system of pastoral support to place a greater emphasis on academic guidance. This is a positive step, although the new arrangements have yet to demonstrate their full impact on identifying students who are underperforming and ensuring the support they receive is raising their attainment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal and senior leaders ensure that The West Somerset Community College is a united and harmonious community, built on respect and shared values. Leaders at all levels have a clear, shared vision for the college in which raising the achievement of all students is central. The college's specialist status has been used very effectively to forge close links with partners and to improve the curriculum. Senior leaders collect information from a wide range of sources to inform their self-evaluation. College targets have been adjusted to be more challenging, in part as a consequence of improved monitoring systems that have provided greater accountability from middle leaders. This has led to accelerated progress in the last year and is reflected in appropriate future priorities. However, some recent initiatives have not had time to demonstrate their full effect. Financial management is good as resources are focused on areas which are priorities for improvement. The college is inclusive and promotes equality strongly through good policies and procedures. The contribution of the college to community cohesion is good. Students have a variety of opportunities to appreciate and understand the local community and international links promote their wider cultural understanding. Governors discharge their responsibilities effectively, and hold the college to account for its performance.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The West Somerset Community College, Minehead, TA24 6AJ

As you know, your college was inspected on 29 and 30 April. I am writing to let you know the judgements which the team of inspectors made about your college. I thank those of you who helped the inspection by talking to us about your work and life at the college. Many of your parents or carers returned a questionnaire and we also took their views into account when making judgements.

The West Somerset Community College provides a good quality of education. You and your parents are rightly pleased with what the college has to offer. Good teaching ensures that you make good progress. The college has used its technology status to forge excellent links with the local community and to provide an outstanding range of courses. These courses help you, whatever your interests and capabilities, to enjoy life at the college and to achieve well.

Inspectors think your behaviour is good and that you are very sensible in respecting college equipment and using it safely. We are also impressed with the mature way you take on responsibility in the college and contribute to the local community. The college works very well with other agencies to provide a good quality of care. For example, good support is provided for those of you who experience difficulty with your work and the college is taking strong action to help some of you improve your attendance.

The college is well led and teachers are keen to find ways of making it better. We have asked the college to do three things that will help:

- Ensure teachers in subjects across the college help you to improve your literacy skills.
- Make sure marking is used consistently to help you improve your work.
- Check closely on how well you are progressing with your work and to make sure you are getting the right help to achieve your best.

You can help by always producing your best work and by following up the teachers' suggested corrections.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Redpath

Her Majesty's Inspector