



The Community College Whitstable

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 118803
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280394
Inspection dates 2 May 2006 to 3 May 2006
Reporting inspector Helen Hutchings AI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Bellevue Road
School category	Community		Whitstable
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Kent CT5 1PX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01227 272362
Number on roll	1003	Fax number	01227 770275
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Keith Hooker
Date of previous inspection	22 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Helena Sullivan-Tighe

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	2 May 2006 - 3 May 2006	280394

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a large mixed non-selective school, with a sixth form of 96 students. Most students are from White British backgrounds. A few students join the college as unaccompanied refugees. The number of looked after children is higher than found in most schools. The college is in an area of high unemployment. About a third of students are identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities, almost twice the national average, although the proportion holding statements of special educational needs is average. The attainment of students on entry to the college is generally well below average with far fewer higher attainers than found in schools nationally, because many higher attaining students in the area attend selective, faith or specialist schools. The college works in partnership with other local secondary schools and a further education college to provide courses for older students and there is a vocational centre on the site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Community College Whitstable is a good and improving school, which provides good value for money. It has recently been recognised by the Department for Education and Skills as the most improved school nationally over the last three years in the Year 9 tests. The college reflects its aim to 'strive for excellence' well in its everyday work. Although GCSE and Year 9 test results are below the national average, students make good progress, having joined the college with generally low attainment. They enjoy their work because they feel valued and understand what they have to do to improve further. Students commented particularly on how they enjoy and value the wide range of practical activities provided in lessons. The curriculum matches the needs of students very well and, together with good teaching, is contributing to the sustained improvement in students' achievements at all levels in the college. Although a minority do not attend well, students' personal development and well-being are good and they develop into confident young adults. Leadership, management and governance are good and have been successful in placing the college at the heart of the local community by improving the use of its facilities. The college is innovative in much of its work. It is effective in constantly developing its use of technology, such as in a pilot project in science to assess students' work on-line and share this with parents and carers through the internet. Parents are highly supportive of the college's work. The college evaluates its performance well and inspectors broadly agree with its evaluation. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The college has demonstrated that it has the capacity for sustained improvement and has developed a momentum to improve standards much further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

In the college's judgement, the sixth form's effectiveness is satisfactory and inspectors agree. Students achieve well, so that by the end of Year 13, most make good progress to attain higher levels than were predicted. Standards are improving year on year, but remain below the national average. Personal development is good and students' confidence increases as they perceive their successes. Many now go forward into higher education. Relationships are good, enabling students to develop the self-esteem they sometimes lacked on entry and many would appreciate more opportunities to help younger students. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan well to overcome students' weaknesses in literacy. Assessment informs students properly about how well they are doing. Effective collaboration with partner schools leads to the provision of a wide range of A-level subjects, but there are not enough courses available to those who wish to study at a lower level. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the capacity to improve is good. The sixth form has grown rapidly in recent years and managers recognise that systems have not yet been refined sufficiently to meet current needs. Students' attendance is not been monitored well by the college and students do not have guidance early enough about how to apply for higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve the attendance of a minority of students in the 11-16 school and in the sixth form.
- Broaden the range of provision in the sixth form and improve the quality of careers advice and guidance to sixth form students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results in external examinations have improved significantly over the last three years, although standards remain below national averages by the end of Year 9 and in GCSE. Students make good progress in relation to their low attainment on entry to the college. In the 2005 national tests and GCSE examinations, students made satisfactory progress and met the challenging targets set for them. Students currently in the college have enjoyed greater stability in staffing and improved provision for a longer time and are now making good progress. The college's data indicates that they are on course to exceed their targets. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and vulnerable children such as those in care and asylum seekers, make similar rates of progress. The college recognises that in the past lower-attaining boys did not do as well as their peers and is successfully implementing a number of strategies to improve their progress. Where performance has been inconsistent across subjects, the college has taken prompt action often involving focused external support, to ensure that performance is improved quickly and brought into line with other subjects. Attention to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills, which are low on entry, is proving successful and helping students to achieve well in other subjects. Students are appreciative of and committed to a range of opportunities designed to improve their achievement, such as revision and individual mentoring programmes. In the sixth form, standards reached in examinations are below the national average but students' progress is good in relation to their much lower than average standards on taking up their courses. In 2005, results in AS and A level examinations continued a three year trend of improvement and met college targets. Achievement in both academic and vocational courses is similar, although students remaining into Year 13 do particularly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good throughout the college. Most students behave well and have positive attitudes to study. They enjoy learning. On those occasions when inappropriate behaviour occurs, there are good systems to deal with it so that the learning of others is unimpaired. Students say that bullying is rare and is dealt with well when it is reported to adults in the college. Students contribute well to the community life of the college and they are prepared to take on responsibilities, such as the college council and youth parliament. The college successfully gives prominence to developing workplace and business skills in the main school, but this is less so in the sixth form. Increasingly,

students are adopting safe and healthy lifestyles. The lunchtime menu offers a wide range of healthy foods and students are becoming discerning diners. Students respect the new accommodation and the site is well maintained. Attendance is satisfactory. Most students attend regularly and are punctual, but a significant minority have frequent absences leading to overall attendance below the national average. This is monitored rigorously; students are very well supported by the college and external agencies, and attendance is improving. Attendance in the sixth form is lower than in the main school and the monitoring systems have not yet been rigorously extended to this group.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning in the main school and in the sixth form are good. The programme of observation, review and support over the last three years has effectively raised the quality of teaching further since the last inspection. It is a continuing process of improvement that says much for the college's concern to raise standards and the accuracy and fairness of its evaluation. In the best lessons observed during the inspection, teaching was fast paced and planned very well to involve students in a variety of challenging activities. Students enjoyed their learning and made very good progress as a result. They particularly appreciate the wide range of practical activities to help them learn. They co-operate well with each other, making group tasks and practical work productive. The college has recognised that the increased range of approaches introduced in recent years is helping more students to attain higher standards and is trying to broaden this even further. Assessment is good and students know where they are and what they need to do to improve. The college makes good use of data to track students' progress and identify potential underachievement so that further support is provided quickly. There are some inconsistencies in the amount and quality of marking across subjects; on the other hand, there is an interesting and successful pilot programme for on-line assessment in science that deserves to be taken forward in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 11 is good. Extensive analysis of students' needs has led to innovative, well planned provision which challenges and supports students of all abilities. An 'express' band enables higher-attaining students to enter examinations early, using time gained for useful, individually tailored further learning. A well planned 'creative' curriculum, where students with additional educational needs in Years 7 to 9 are grouped to study in a thematic way, has motivated participants very effectively and is leading to improved self-esteem and standards. Good provision

for students' personal development ensures that students know how to stay safe and healthy. Collaboration with partner schools ensures a very good choice of GCSE and vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11, which matches the needs of all students. Popular extra-curricular opportunities extend learning well, as do opportunities for students to use college facilities beyond the normal school day. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory, but there are not enough courses available to those who wish to study at a lower level than A or AS level. There are, however, good plans to improve access to vocational and lower level courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are good and contribute significantly to students' personal development and improving achievement. Students, parents and staff speak highly of this aspect of the college's work because the wide-ranging provision has contributed well to students feeling valued and supported. Child protection issues are handled promptly and effectively. Students' relationships between themselves and with adults are very good, so that many have confidence to seek help when needed. The college has well embedded systems in place to recognise concerns that students have and to give appropriate support. For example, the 'Retrack' system is particularly effective in dealing with individual problems and has contributed to a reduction in the number of exclusions. The college has responded well to recommendations put forward by the college council. Careers advice is good and includes support to raise aspirations and awareness about further and higher education. Overall, care and guidance in the sixth form is satisfactory, but students do not receive the detailed information they require about higher education early enough. In particular, students in Year 12 said that they would appreciate earlier advice on application procedures. The student support team provides careful personal and academic guidance. Students' progress is monitored regularly, targets are agreed for the next stage and carefully co-ordinated support is provided if underachievement is identified. The support for vulnerable students is very good because staff base support on a good knowledge of their needs. Similarly, gifted and talented students are well supported through the curriculum.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides an exceptionally clear direction, which is based on innovative thinking and team development. She is highly respected by colleagues and has the committed support of a very effective leadership team and of hard-working staff, so that there is strong teamwork across the whole college. This has resulted in an impetus which has led to a sustained rise in standards. Leadership and management are strongly supported by governors who are confident of further improvement. They provide professional expertise and firmly

challenge the college's activities and performance. They have a clear sense that opening up the college to the community is bringing further benefits. Improved recruitment and an effective programme of professional development has produced generally good subject leadership. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The college has recognised that, while some informal systems in place have been successful for the small number of sixth form students in the past, these now need to be refined further to meet the needs of the increased numbers of students at this level. The college makes judgements about its own performance that are largely accurate because of its effective review and monitoring procedures. These have been particularly effective in ensuring sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and students' achievements over the past three years. Any potential underperformance is addressed robustly. Financial management is good and resources have been used particularly well to improve the college's buildings, facilities and the environment generally so that its aim to be a flagship school in the community can be fulfilled. There is much that is exciting about the work of the college. Innovation is carefully thought through before introduction. Bidding for additional support has been focused and effective, such as the recently announced success in 'Schools for the Future' funding. These important factors contribute to the college's strong capacity to improve further.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
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	4	4
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	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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	3
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	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	Yes

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

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for the friendly way in which you welcomed us, talked to us about your work and shared your views about the college. Inspection takes place to see what the college does well and for us to suggest ways in which it could improve. We found that:

- There is a positive atmosphere in the college and we agree with you that it is improving all the time.
- Staff support you very well in your personal development. This helps you to work well together and you clearly want to work hard.
- Standards have improved well in recent years and students are on course to achieve even higher standards in examinations in the future.
- You told us that you are taught well and we agree. You commented particularly on the wide range of practical activities which help you.
- You have a good choice of extra-curricular activities to meet your interests and needs and you participate well in these.
- The headteacher and staff have a clear view about how CCW will develop further. We heard something of this during the whole school assembly and you told us that you appreciate the improvements in facilities.
- The college council gives you a good chance to have your say about what needs to be improved.

We agree with the things that Mrs Sullivan-Tighe and the staff are planning to make the college better and to help you to achieve higher levels in your examinations. The most important areas for improvement are:

- A few students, including some in the sixth form, need to take up the support on offer to help them to improve their attendance.
- A wider range of vocational courses needs to be offered in the sixth form so that more of you will feel able to remain in full-time education after Year 11.

We wish you the very best for your future and the future of the college.

Mrs Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector