

Futures College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132762
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	354002
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2010
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	615
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr B Clark
Headteacher	Mr Simon Carpenter
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors. The lead HMI had visited the college on five previous occasions since it became part of the government's Fresh Start initiative in September 2007.

The inspection team observed 35 lessons, all taught by different staff. Professional feedback was offered to all staff who were observed teaching. Senior staff were invited to conduct a number of joint observations of teaching and learning with HMI.

- Inspectors looked at learning support, and met with nominated staff, governors, and groups of students in both formal and informal settings. The inspection team observed all aspects of the school's work, looked at attendance records, student progress data and reviewed all safeguarding procedures. HMI reviewed the 40 parental questionnaires returned. A total of 250 student and the 11 staff questionnaires were also evaluated.
- The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:
 - safeguarding procedures
 - the rising trend in standards and achievement
 - the level of student attendance
 - the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to enhance learning
 - the impact of curriculum provision.

Information about the school

The college is smaller than average and draws students from the Kursall area of the town centre and the surrounding wards. Numbers on roll are rising. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above the national figure, as is the proportion of those whose first language is not English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure, and so is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. There are a small number of looked after children in the college. Significant numbers of students have joined each year group other than at the normal time of entry. For example, 25% of the current Years 10 and 11 joined the college without completing their primary education in the United Kingdom. There are four selective schools within the local authority.

The college is part of a Learning Trust with Prospects College, a work based learning provider, and the two establishments are due to move into new purpose-built premises on the same site in September 2010. A proposal has been submitted to the Department of Children, Schools and Families to extend the Learning Trust to include: Prospects College, Southend High School for Girls and South Essex College of Further and Higher Education.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school ready for the challenges of transferring into the beautiful new accommodation due for completion in September 2010. This initiative has been brought to the brink of completion by the imagination and hard work of a dedicated team. Self-evaluation is realistic, if a little modest.

The College was opened in 2007 as part of the government's Fresh Start initiative. Standards have risen steadily since then. The 2010 early entry GCSE and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) results are notably stronger than the positive results secured in 2009. All groups of students now make at least the progress expected for their age and ability. Equality of opportunity is good; students from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds do as well or better than their peers.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved steadily since the college opened and is satisfactory overall. The impact of the rising proportion of effective teaching is evident in the students' current work, and senior staff are correct to focus on enhancing the proportion of good teaching available. Outstanding teaching was seen on this occasion in mathematics and English. Marking is generally satisfactory and the assessment database is robust. The most effective teaching secures high level oral responses from students and has a consistent focus on developing the students' subject specific literacy and numeracy skills. Opportunities to enhance engagement in this way are missed in some lessons. In the best lessons, learning support staff form an effective team with the class teacher.

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory overall. However, many aspects of pastoral care are good and the efforts made to support looked after children are often exemplary. The college is working very hard to improve attendance and, although notable improvements have been secured, this remains low. Inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory. Three-quarters of the parental responses to the inspection questionnaire viewed behaviour as good although student responses were evenly divided; some students and parents express reservations with regard to bullying.

Curriculum provision includes a wide range of vocational courses and the curriculum developments introduced two years ago have been key the rising standards now evident. Students have been offered the outstanding range of vocational courses provided through Prospects College to be located in the new upper school building from September 2010 and range of academic courses available are rightly being reviewed by senior staff. Post-16 courses will be available for the first time in the new academic year. Effective leadership and management has been the key to the progress made by the college in the last year and there are real strengths in governance and partnership

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working. A great deal was achieved by the dedication of the previous principal, her senior team and the Learning Trust; the impact of the curriculum and school improvement changes, made in the last two years, is clearly evident in rising standards. Governors, the current principal and the leadership of the Learning Trust have transition arrangements in place to secure the move to the new shared provision. All concerned have combined effectively to deliver a vision of high value learning opportunities; the 19 million pound upper school building that opens in September 2010 is a tangible reflection of this ambition and success. Capacity to improve is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise standards and achievement by:
 - ensuring the balance of the academic curriculum continues to grow to match the development of the vocational provision secured,
 - developing the use of assessment for learning to enhance the match of tasks to students' individual learning needs.
- Further improve the teaching and learning by:
 - focussing on the quality of learning in each lesson
 - refining the tracking of student progress to enable senior staff to manage interventions at group and individual level.
- Improve attendance by continuing to work with 'hard-to-reach' parent groups.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

A clear trend of improvement is evident in standards and achievement. In 2009, there were improvements in A* to G pass rates, the performance of boys, the average points scored in English and mathematics, and the percentage of students securing five higher grade passes, including functional English and mathematics. The proportion of students who secured five higher grade GCSE was 45%. Although this was significantly below the national average, it represents an 11% improvement on those secured in the college's first year. However, the percentage of students attaining five A* to C GCSE, including English and mathematics, remained below the national floor target set by the government.

The 2010 results already received from the examination boards are notably stronger than last year, with over 80% of students having already secured five A* to G including English and mathematics; similarly, 100% of BTEC performing arts students have passed their course and the majority have secured a higher level qualification.

Attainment on entry varies considerably and is low for many students. A significant proportion of students in each year group have not completed their primary education in the United Kingdom. The students' current learning and performance in the classroom

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mirror the improvements established in the most recent examination results. In almost all lessons, students make satisfactory progress. Lesson outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In an outstanding Year 9 mathematics lesson, lower achieving students were introduced to algebra and nurtured through its basic operations so effectively that, by the end of the lesson, they were confidently balancing equations to find a solution. Enjoyment and achievement are satisfactory, with strengths evident in the rising numbers of students who are successfully entered early for public examinations. Inspectors found three-quarters of parents positive on 'feeling safe' and observed good procedures to support this view.

A good range of popular healthy school meals are available, and the proportion of students engaged in sport is high. Students complained about the dining facilities and the cost of meals currently available but are excited about the restaurant facilities available in the new building. The range of workplace and other skills the students develop towards their future economic well-being are satisfactory because significant improvement has been secured in the students' key skills from their very low starting points, standards of attainment, and their progress on vocational courses.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory but there is a significant percentage of lessons that are good and some that are outstanding. The best lessons engaged the students and drew attentive responses. Good staff subject knowledge produced confident questioning and promoted good learning. Support staff were well deployed and made a positive contribution. There was a significant focus on examination success and how to improve that was often facilitated by good peer group activities. In an effective GCSE science lesson on the radioactive half-life of atomic material, the simple use of chocolate, half of which disappeared in a given time, made the demanding calculations memorable. These lessons focus consistently on the quality of learning and the use of assessment to inform teaching is effective. In the less successful lessons, the match of task to learning need is limited, hindering student progress and creating student disengagement and, in a small number of cases, inappropriate behaviour. The lack of pace was an inhibiting factor on some occasions and insufficient attention was given to what the students were expected to learn. The school is beginning to take advantage of the most effective teaching to support its coaching for improvement programme.

Good curriculum decisions have provided a balanced range of courses that are helping to raise standards. There remain some underdeveloped areas in, for example, religious education. However, the new range of proven vocational courses to which students previously had to travel across town to access will be available from September 2010 through the partnership with Prospects College. Senior staff have taken the correct decision to revise the curriculum pathways for Years 8 to 11 to ensure students begin courses with the key skills required to make rapid progress.

The impact of the pastoral support system is evident in: the improvements secured in the students' behaviour in the last year and the often positive relationships between representatives of different minority ethnic groups. Support for individuals and vulnerable groups is excellent and students are very positive about the personal support they receive when difficulties arise. Attendance remains low at just over 90% and this places limitations of the overall grade inspectors are able to award regarding this area of the college's work. Satisfactory careers guidance has helped improve the proportion of students who go on to further education, employment or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

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How effective are leadership and management?

In the last year, the leadership team has embedded ambition and driven forward improvement. The senior leadership team has been strengthened in the last year by the effective contributions of a number of middle managers. All the staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt they were proud to be a member of staff at Futures College. The monitoring of teaching and learning is satisfactory and the impact of this work has secured a satisfactory standard of education for all, with a rising proportion of good provision. Not enough is done to engage with hard to reach groups of parents in order to raise the rate of attendance; over a third of parents felt communication between parents and college was an area that needed to improve. A real strength of the leadership team's work in recent years has been the partnership working with the Prospects College. This has secured dramatic changes in the working environment and the curriculum opportunities now offered. Governors must take credit for their work in this area and the contribution the changes secured have made to the good equality of opportunity now evident in the rising standards.

Community cohesion is satisfactory but, understandably, the college has limited itself to a focus on the local community in recent years. Safeguarding arrangements are good although support for those on the child protection register is excellent.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

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Only a small proportion of parents completed the questionnaire. Of these, nearly 90% of parents felt this child enjoyed their education and that the college kept their child safe. They were equally positive that their child was well prepared for the future and that their individual needs were met. Three-quarters were happy with the education provided and the leadership of the college.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Futures College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 615 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	4	10	32	80	4	10	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	5	13	30	75	3	8	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	5	13	22	55	10	25	3	8
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	20	22	55	5	13	3	8
The teaching is good at this school	5	13	23	58	6	15	3	8
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	13	23	58	8	20	3	8
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	3	25	63	11	28	2	5
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	4	10	30	75	3	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	3	8	31	78	5	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	5	26	65	7	18	4	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	8	19	48	12	30	5	13
The school is led and managed effectively	2	5	27	68	5	13	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	6	15	25	63	6	15	2	5

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Futures College, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 4UY

As some of you will have been aware, I have had the pleasure of visiting Futures College for the last two years. This report represents my last visit and I want to thank you for the numerous personal courtesies and insights into the quality of your own education you have offered to me and the teams of inspectors who have worked with me.

I am very pleased to see the rising standard of your work and the positive way you get on with one another. However, the attendance of some of you needs to improve if you are to make the most of the wonderful new facilities to be provided from September.

The quality of the learning opportunities provided for you has improved significantly and it is really good to see how well you respond to challenging work and imaginative teaching. I have asked the principal to continue the focus on standards and achievement by further refining the curriculum provision and the match of tasks to your needs as learners. This focus on learning outcomes will help the college provide better academic support. In addition, I have also asked the principal to ensure that attendance improves.

It has been a real privilege to see you develop as learners as the college has strived to improve and I wish you success as you move into your new buildings.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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