

Witchford Village College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110871
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	302328
Inspection dates	13 - 14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker 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	11 - 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	874
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr David Hardman
Headteacher	Mr David Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	12 - 15 May 2003
School address	Manor Road Witchford Ely CB6 2JA
Telephone number	01353 662053
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Age group	11 - 16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This specialist sports college serves the village of Witchford and a large rural catchment. Although still a little smaller than average, the college has grown in size since the last inspection. Students come from a range of backgrounds, but the vast majority are White British. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities. A small but significant number of students are from Traveller families. During the last two years there has been a high turnover of staff and the college continues to face significant staffing and recruitment difficulties, including the long-term absence of several teachers. The current principal took up post in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The college has a number of strengths. Some aspects of its provision are excellent, but others, including teaching, are patchy so that the outcomes for students, particularly in terms of their academic achievement, are also variable. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance is satisfactory, as is behaviour, and students say they feel safe. They develop a good understanding of the need to pursue healthy lifestyles and, when they leave the college at 16, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life. The excellent care and support that the college provides for its most vulnerable students is a model of good practice. The college is strongly committed to catering for the needs of all students equally. However, care, guidance and support are judged to be only satisfactory overall, because existing procedures are not rigorously applied, and the college is not yet up-to-date in meeting legislative requirements for safeguarding students. This shortcoming is currently being addressed.

Achievement is satisfactory. When students first arrive, the standards of their work are broadly in line with those expected. They make sound progress as they move through the college, so that results in GCSE examinations are in line with national averages. However, this picture of satisfactory achievement overall masks some wide fluctuations in the progress students make in different lessons.

The curriculum is good because the college offers a good range of suitable pathways for students and has good extra-curricular provision. The college's sports specialism makes a strong contribution to provision and to the students' personal development. The quality of teaching is satisfactory; much is good, but some is inadequate. The uneven quality of learning reflects this variable provision. Although the college is developing a common approach to collating assessment information, this is not used consistently by teachers to plan work to meet the needs of all students. Assessments of students' progress, including marking, are not sufficiently rigorous or helpful.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. In some respects, the college's leadership is strong and effective, but evidence of underachievement and weaknesses in provision indicate that aspects of senior and middle leadership have not been as effective as they need to be. The newly appointed principal has restructured the college's leadership and implemented a number of important changes. The self-evaluation of the college's strengths and areas for improvement is accurate and honest. Suitable systems are in place for day-to-day management and for checking the college's performance. However, too many procedures are not implemented rigorously or efficiently, including the way that information is communicated between staff and with parents. The college has addressed the specific issues from the last inspection, but should have done more to improve communication at all levels; too many parents and students feel that they are not properly consulted or informed about key decisions that the college makes. Nonetheless, the recent actions taken by the senior management team demonstrate that the college has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall quality and consistency of teaching to eliminate the variations in the rates of progress that students make in different subjects and classes.
- Make more effective use of assessment information, including marking, to guide and monitor students' improvement in lessons and over time.
- Tighten the college's systems to ensure that leadership at all levels is held accountable for driving improvement and that day-to-day management is rigorous.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of communication and ensure that the views of parents and students are properly canvassed.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards on entry are broadly in line with age-related expectations. Achievement is satisfactory overall because the majority of students make expected rates of progress during their time in the college. However, this headline judgement hides the unevenness of much of this progress, linked with the variable quality of teaching and learning. Overall standards have risen in recent years but results have fluctuated considerably, particularly in English, mathematics and science, in large part caused by staffing difficulties. In contrast, students with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because of carefully targeted support.

Results in the Key Stage 3 national tests in 2006 fell below the college's targets and were too low, particularly in English. College data indicates that students in Years 7 to 9 are now making satisfactory progress, although it recognises there is still room for improvement. Results in GCSE examinations in 2006 were broadly in line with national averages but were also below the college's own targets. Moreover, there was considerable variation between subjects. Students performed particularly well in the BTEC First Diploma as well as GCSEs in the humanities, arts and languages. Standards in mathematics and science, however, were barely satisfactory. The college has worked hard to improve standards this year and is making better use of data to identify student underachievement and to target suitable support. Consequently, current progress, reflected in completed GCSE and BTEC assessments, indicates that standards have improved in mathematics and science and have been at least sustained in the other subject areas. Specialist school attainment targets for 2006 were met at Key Stage 3 but not for GCSE physical education (PE). However, the successful BTEC awards in sports studies have made a good contribution to raising standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. By the age of 16, students develop as confident young adults with good personal qualities. They are well behaved around the college; they show respect for one another and are polite and helpful to visitors. Although most students have positive attitudes to their learning, there remains too much distracted behaviour in lessons, linked with weaker teaching and the long lesson times.

Students' spiritual development is satisfactory, and their moral, social and cultural development is good. Attendance is satisfactory because the great majority of students attend college regularly. In general they enjoy school, particularly the wider opportunities that the college offers. There is good participation in the wide range of sporting activities and other clubs. Students understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking. They feel safe and protected at college and are confident that there are adults to whom they can turn when they are troubled. They speak enthusiastically of the positive impact of the anti-bullying association. Many schemes such as peer mentoring, the House Councils and the Student Executive encourage students to contribute to the college community, but these do not give students sufficient opportunity to participate in decision making. There are impressive opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills through the Junior Sports Leader Award and in organising sports events. Students have a good understanding of the world of work and are well prepared for life after college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are particularly well supported and consequently make good progress. Most teachers rise to the challenge of the 100 minute lessons by planning a good range of activities that are suitably linked with clear learning objectives. In general, teachers use a good variety of resources to set interesting tasks, and many make very good use of the electronic whiteboards to structure and stimulate learning. The most lively and engaging teaching is able to sustain a good pace, and maximises the lesson time to produce high quality outcomes. However, where teaching is pedestrian or dull, particularly in the latter part of the lesson, individual students can become disengaged and disruptive.

The high turnover of teachers, including temporary staff, has led to discontinuity and inconsistency in the learning of too many students. Too many classes have experienced variability in the quality and challenge of teaching, including marking and setting of suitable homework. Although some assessment is rigorous and effective, too often students are unclear what they need to do to improve. The college collates and distributes assessment data to monitor the progress of students and to identify underachievement. Some teachers make good use of this information to raise expectations of what students should achieve, but it is inconsistently used to plan suitably challenging work in lessons for students of different abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The long lessons enable many subjects to provide significant skills development in a single session, particularly in practical subjects and PE. There is a wide range of academic subjects complemented with a good and expanding range of vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11. The college makes effective use of the facilities at the local further education college to extend its vocational provision in areas such as hair and beauty, motor vehicle studies and construction. Careers advice and preparation for the world of work are good.

The range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, is extensive and is well supported by late transport for participants. The specialist sports college status makes a strong contribution to the provision, although its wider impact across the college has not yet been fully realised. Younger students have more than two hours of PE per week, and all students are given ample opportunity to supplement their core lessons. Very good liaison with the local primary schools enables them to benefit from the PE expertise offered.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The college provides some very high quality care, guidance and support for its students and staff. Indeed, where this is targeted at the most vulnerable students it is exemplary. Staff in the student support service give of their time and skills unstintingly to ensure that their students are happy and are able to make academic progress. They liaise closely with parents and carers and also with outside support agencies. Provision for students from the Traveller community and from families of Show People has been recognised as a model of good practice.

Other aspects of the college's systems to support its students are also strong. There are good induction arrangements for younger students joining the college, students with difficulties or disabilities receive effective support and provision for gifted and talented students is developing well. However, the college's existing procedures for monitoring students, communicating with parents and carers and analysing information are not sufficiently rigorous or consistently implemented. Data is available to track students' progress and identify underachievement, but this is not used consistently across the college. Health and safety requirements are met but the college is only now in the process of updating the necessary documentation and training to ensure that it meets all current legislative requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since his recent appointment, the principal has undertaken an audit of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. The college's leadership has also been restructured, with roles and responsibilities suitably streamlined to achieve greater consistency and accountability. The senior leadership team has acted swiftly to prioritise several issues, including a more consistent approach to the management of behaviour. The principal's clear steer has raised morale, and staff, students and parents recognise the positive impact of these actions.

The quality of middle management varies widely. The most effective curriculum and pastoral managers contribute significantly to the school's drive for improvement, but there is too much inconsistency in the way that middle managers undertake their responsibilities. Procedures for line management are systematic and increasingly rigorous, with evaluations more soundly based on reliable assessment information. College self-evaluation is honest and accurate and recognises the areas that require strengthening. Improvement planning is suitably prioritised and is properly guided by the findings of subject reviews. Governors are supportive and well informed and have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development. Their ability to hold it to account is satisfactory.

The college's arrangements for checking the progress of pupils and monitoring its own performance are satisfactory and improving. However, the implementation of some day-to-day procedures is not sufficiently rigorous. The laxity of these has been highlighted by parents, many of whom have concerns about the quality of communication at all levels. Weaknesses in consultation and communication also apply to the students, many of whom do not feel that their views are properly canvassed or responded to.

The college has addressed each of the action points raised at the last inspection but its efforts to raise attainment have been frustrated by continuing staffing difficulties. It has sensible plans, both immediate and long-term, to address this and other issues and has demonstrated that the college has the capacity to make necessary improvements.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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

¹ Grade 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.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No



15 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Witchford Village College, Witchford, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB6 2JA

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by how mature and sensible you were when you spoke with us. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the college.

Our own judgements agree closely with those of the college. In general you make satisfactory progress as you move through the college, but some of this progress is uneven or inconsistent, often because of numerous changes in teachers. Much of your teaching is good, particularly when subjects take advantage of the long lessons to complete high quality work. On the other hand, the pace of learning tends to drag when learning activities are rather repetitive or slow paced. We were particularly impressed with:

- the high standard of your work in some areas;
- the positive attitudes and behaviour that most of you sustained in lessons and around the college;
- the excellent work of the student support service;
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly sports, that so many of you participate in.

The college recognises areas that need strengthening, and we have asked that it focuses particularly on:

- improving the overall quality and consistency of teaching;
- making better use of assessment information, including marking, to guide your improvement;
- making sure that management systems work effectively;
- improving communication with parents and students, so that everyone is properly informed, consulted and involved in decision making.

You all have a role to play in bringing about improvements. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector