

Freman College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137002
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	385563
Inspection dates	11–12 January 2012
Lead inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	899
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Martin
Headteacher	Helen Loughran
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2009
School address	Bowling Green Lane Buntingford SG9 9BT
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Age group	13–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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Additional inspector

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 41 lessons, of which four were observed jointly with the college's managers. Inspectors made several shorter visits to classrooms to observe learning, particularly for students with special educational needs. Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and college staff, including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the college's work, and looked at self-evaluation reports, lesson observation records, improvement plans and the college's monitoring records showing the progress of current students. Inspectors considered responses to the questionnaires from 284 parents and carers and others completed by staff and students.

Information about the school

This college is smaller than the average sized secondary school, largely because of its upper school status. It has a relatively large sixth form which is increasing in size year-on-year. The college converted to academy status in August 2011. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. Almost all students have English as their first language. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs is below average. The college meets the current floor standard, whereby the government sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good college with a friendly, safe, enjoyable and supportive atmosphere. Students, parents and carers, and staff speak very highly of all aspects of the college's work. Students' behaviour is good; they have good attitudes to learning, develop very good personal, social and communication skills, rapidly gain confidence and learn quickly in most subjects. Results have improved year-on-year in almost every subject and are above average. Students make good progress and, in a number of subjects including mathematics, they make outstanding progress.
- Teachers' high expectations, excellent support and thorough assessment ensure that teaching is consistently good. In several subjects, teaching is often outstanding. However, some of the features of the most effective teaching, such as high levels of challenge for more-able students and highly effective checks on learning, are not evident in all lessons.
- The curriculum meets students' needs very well. The strong emphasis on core subjects and languages along with a broad range of mainly academic courses works well to promote achievement. The mix of courses in the curriculum is well balanced; it interests and motivates almost all students. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Teachers, along with daily college life promote this in a wide range of ways.
- The headteacher and senior leaders provide strong leadership and are rightly aspirational for the college. They have made many improvements including in raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. Self-evaluation is accurate and used well to identify areas for improvement. Some routine monitoring of subject performance lacks rigour.
- The sixth form is good. The very high standard of teaching and excellent support provided ensures that students achieve well and progress positively on to higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share the considerable expertise in planning and implementing strategies to provide a high level of challenge for more-able students, which is evident in the most effective lessons, to ensure that all teachers consistently stretch and extend these students' knowledge and skills.
- Increase further the effectiveness of teachers' checks on learning in lessons to ensure that all their interventions have the maximum impact on the quality of learning.
- Increase the rigour in the routine monitoring of subject performance by placing a higher emphasis on the systematic and frequent evaluation of data, quantitative measures and performance compared to the set targets.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics has been well above average for the last four years. Students' attainment in mathematics is consistently very high and results in almost all subjects are above average. In 2011, results were significantly high in a number of subjects including art and design, geography and physical education. Attainment of most groups of students is above average. Attainment of middle ability students in English was below average in 2011; however, current students in this group are making increased progress as shown by the college's monitoring records and inspectors' observations. Students, including from different groups and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress overall and exceptional progress in mathematics, science and humanities. Progress in English and languages was average in 2011, but inspectors' observations confirmed that current students are making mostly good or better progress in these subjects. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agree that their children are making good progress.

Students' reading, mathematical and communication skills are very good; most students' writing is of high standard but inspectors observed a very small minority of untidy writing which had not improved as much as it should have done over time. Development of practical skills is given high priority as shown by students' prowess in playing sport, drawing and acting. Study skills are developed well and a large majority of students become exceptionally good at self-motivation and working independently.

Achievement in the sixth form is good. Results at GCE A level are increasing and, in 2011, the percentage of students gaining high grades was much higher than average. However, in the same year, results at GCE AS level were lower in several subjects than previously. As a result, actions are in place to monitor students' progress more closely; the college's records of monitoring of current students' progress and inspectors' observations show they are making improved progress. The progress of students compared to their starting points overall is good and their personal and social development is exceptionally good.

Quality of teaching

Most lessons are consistently good. This judgement is overwhelmingly endorsed by parents and carers, and by students. Teachers have considerable subject expertise and use this to good effect in many lessons. Students readily give examples of how this motivates them, including in physical education lessons and in the arts, and makes them want to give of their best, which they often do. Teachers plan carefully and know their students well. They use a wide range of strategies that make learning interesting and enjoyable alongside developing students' personal, social and study skills very well. The structure of the curriculum supports this very well. Paired or small group work is a frequent and highly effective component of lessons. Students move confidently and easily between working collaboratively and independently.

The creative elements of lessons stimulate students' imagination frequently and moral issues are explored well. Most teachers make sure that students think for themselves, challenging them by using strategies such as a sequence of probing questions or demanding tasks which are matched well to students' abilities. However, in a small minority of lessons, this level of challenge is not consistently high enough, particularly for higher attaining students. In a few lessons, teachers take too much time explaining points without involving students sufficiently. Although students are rarely disengaged when this occurs, it means that their understanding is not as fully developed as it could be. Very occasionally, resources are not used to best effect, for example, interactive technology or projected images.

Students often relish the challenging tasks they are set, for example, in drama lessons where they produce short performances linked to the lesson theme. Assessment is thorough and prepares students well for final tests. Work is often presented to a high standard, for example, in the arts. Careful attention is paid to writing, spelling and grammar. The large majority of teachers routinely correct these errors as well as providing detailed improvement actions for students to use to improve their work. However, in a few subjects this high quality approach is not so consistently used or comprehensive marking takes place too infrequently to aid maximum improvement. Students are often involved in peer evaluation and teachers guide them cleverly to learn how to do this effectively and purposefully.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are consistently very well-behaved, courteous and respectful. They work diligently nearly all of the time. Parents and carers endorse this view. Movement around the college is calm and purposeful. Students are rarely late for lessons and get on with their work quickly in almost all lessons. Instances of inappropriate behaviour in lessons are very rare; however, in Years 9 to 11, there are a few occasions where a very few students pay less attention or are slightly disengaged, for example, through intermittent low-level chatting. Mostly, teachers tackle this successfully but not completely consistently.

Behaviour in the sixth form is very good. In all years, students contribute very well to lessons and provide excellent role models for younger students. Attendance has improved and is above average in the current year. The rate of exclusion is consistently low. Bullying is rare and dealt with very effectively. Younger students draw on support from sixth formers very well, in part because the well-structured

and highly effective vertical tutor system promotes good and supportive relationships across year groups.

Students, parents and carers have almost no concerns about safety. Safety is high on the agenda at all levels of management and governors pay full attention to ensuring that safeguards are in place. Improvements to perimeter fencing and clearer signage at entry points along with consistent challenge to strangers on site have increased site security. Students are well aware of their own and others' safety and routinely use safe practices. Risk assessment is thorough.

Leadership and management

The experienced headteacher's very good leadership has successfully embedded a strong focus on the achievement of every individual student. She is supported by capable and highly accountable senior managers. Senior managers know the college's strengths and weaknesses well; they use honest and accurate self-evaluation to identify areas in need of improvement. These features place the college in a very strong position to improve further.

Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and risk assessment is used well where appropriate. Managers at all levels promote equality well; close scrutiny of the performance of different student groups, sizeable or not, takes place. In the few instances where achievement gaps exist, such as between boys and girls in the sixth form, these are closing.

Subject leadership and management are increasingly effective; the large majority of departments have consistently good and improving results. Systems for monitoring subject performance are well established; end of year self-evaluation is rigorous but some routine monitoring lacks rigour in measuring progress compared to key performance indicators, such as target grades. This means that in English improvement actions have taken longer to be put in place.

The governing body supports the college well and challenges managers regularly. It is forward looking and its committee structure works well to consider most aspects of the college's work thoroughly. While careful scrutiny of students' results takes place, governors are less aware of some aspects of the performance of different groups of students, for example by gender.

The quality of teaching has improved. The rigorous lesson observation process along with a detailed evaluation of other aspects of teachers' work provides a sound basis for helping teachers to improve. In a few cases, improvement actions identified for individual teachers lack preciseness. Very effective staff development activities have worked well to ensure that most teachers teach consistently good lessons. Inspectors concurred with the college's focus on increasing teachers' use of assessment within lessons as an area for improvement.

The curriculum meets students' needs and interests well. Almost all students say they enjoy coming to college. Students particularly enjoy studying the arts and physical education but they also speak highly of their studies in core subjects such as mathematics. The extra-curricular activities are extensive, complement the

curriculum and enhance students' experiences very well. The house system and mixed-level tutor groups are highly effective in creating a true community spirit and endorsing the college's values. Students' creativity, imagination, spirituality, moral understanding and capacity to work harmoniously with others are developed very well through activities such as artistic performances, trips abroad, charitable work, and work with agencies such as Amnesty International. However, their experience of cultural diversity is less comprehensive.

Management of the sixth form is good. Careful analysis of results has resulted in reviews to guidance about entry into several subjects to ensure that students have the best chance of success. An increase in the monitoring of students' progress by senior managers as a result of some underperformance in Year 12 in 2011 is ensuring that students at risk of underperformance are identified promptly and support is put in place.

Glossary

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.
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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



13 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Freman College, Buntingford SG9 9BT

Thank you for your contribution to the recent inspection of your college. Inspectors were impressed by your good behaviour, friendliness and courteous manner.

We judge your college to have good overall effectiveness. The results you achieve are above average in almost all subjects. Results are particularly good in mathematics but are average in English. You make good progress, including for those of you who are identified as having special educational needs. Results and progress in the sixth form are also good. The standard of work you produce across the college is mostly high.

Teaching is consistently good and in several subjects it is often outstanding. Most teachers are skilled at helping you to learn quickly and effectively. In a very few lessons, more able students do not receive enough challenge and sometimes teachers do not check that you have understood frequently enough.

The headteacher and her experienced and capable staff lead and manage the college well. They know the college well and are highly effective at making improvements. Arrangements to safeguard you are thorough. Equality is promoted well across the college. The curriculum is well planned to meet your needs and to ensure that your social and personal development is good.

These are the actions we have asked managers to take to improve further.

- Improve teaching by sharing the best practice in providing challenge for more able learners and by increasing the frequency of checks on understanding in lessons.
- Increase the effectiveness of routine monitoring of subjects including using data and targets more rigorously to measure performance.

Congratulations on all the good work you do to contribute to college and community life.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis
Her Majesty's Inspector

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