

Helston Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112043
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	357033
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1586
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	355
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Vallender
Headteacher	Patrick MCGovern
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2008
School address	Church Hill Helston TR13 8NR
Telephone number	01326 572685
Fax number	01326 572183
Email address	head@helston.cornwall.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. They visited 47 lessons and held meetings with staff, students, parents and governors. They observed the college's work and looked at the minutes of the meetings of the governing body, aspects of community work, the minutes of meetings with the School Improvement Partner, subject evaluations and college action plans and evaluations. They also scrutinised 862 parent and carer questionnaires, 75 staff questionnaires and 151 student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The extent to which the examination results in 2010 are indicative of the upward trend in both students' attainment and their rate of progress.
- The extent to which the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and academic support have brought about improvements.
- How effective leaders at all levels have been in bringing about and sustaining improvements.

Information about the school

Helston Community College is a very large specialist technology college, on three different sites, which became part of a foundation trust in September 2009. The trust includes partners from both higher and further education, the Diocese of Truro, a local secondary school, the county council and the local careers advice provider. The college draws students from an extensive rural catchment area with the concerns and issues attributed to elements of rural deprivation. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is below average. The vast majority of students are from a White British background. The college had an English subject inspection in November 2009.

Helston Day Care nursery provides childcare for up to 30 children on the same site and is reported on separately.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Helston Community College is outstanding. It provides excellent opportunities for students to thrive and develop very good skills and aptitudes to enable them to make a very marked contribution to society. Students are challenged by their targets and staff consistently ensure that all students are working to their maximum potential. Hence attainment is above average and students make good, and improving, progress. The college's accurate analysis shows that this momentum is set to continue. The highly effective sixth form prepares students well for their next phase of education or for work. The college has been successful at raising the aspirations of students, many of whom are the first in their families to go on to higher education

The quality of students' learning is good because of a combination of excellent guidance and support, a highly motivating curriculum and engaging teaching. Teaching and assessment are good, with some outstanding practitioners. Teachers use assessment very well in many lessons to inform students how to improve, although at times marking is not as effective because it fails to inform students how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better. During the inspection, inspectors saw students enjoying a wide variety of activities during the longer than usual lessons. However, a few lessons are too teacher dominated and do not give students sufficient opportunities to work independently or in groups.

Staff know students very well and offer excellent care. As a result, students enjoy college and their behaviour is excellent. Safeguarding procedures in college are of a very high standard and consequently students say they feel very safe. This judgement is also supported by the returns from the parent and carer questionnaires. Risk assessments for educational visits and other activities are comprehensive, and include the use of public roads by students as they cross from one site to another. However, staff, parents and carers expressed concerns about the safety of students crossing between sites.

The specialist area of technology is key to many of the college's successes. Teaching and learning have improved with the use of technologies within the classroom, the outstanding work with the local community has been greatly enhanced through the specialist areas and technology is a successful GCSE subject.

The college has worked very successfully to improve many elements of its provision, so that now it offers an outstanding curriculum and students' outcomes are excellent. Some areas of improvement have been consolidated, for example those identified during the English inspection, but in other areas they are all not yet fully embedded. Staff share the ambition for continuous improvement and are not complacent, leadership is highly effective and overall there is a good capacity to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to improve the safety of students when they cross the public roads between the different sites.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons are judged to be at least good and more are judged outstanding, by:
 - ensuring that marking consistently informs students about how well they are doing and how they might improve.
 - ensuring students have more opportunities to work independently or in groups
 - ensuring that marking consistently informs students about how well they are doing and how they might improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students start at the college with broadly average levels of attainment. Examination results for 2010 show that students subsequently make excellent progress; levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 are above average. The change of emphasis from considering the proportion of students who gained GCSE grades A* to C to ensuring students at all levels achieve their challenging targets meant that in 2010 students made very good progress. Observations of lessons and the college's accurate analysis show that the improvements from the previous year are likely to continue. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

During the inspection, inspectors observed students making good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in lessons. In practical lessons like construction or art students were very engaged in activities. A music lesson was highly stimulating with students showing respect for each other when they each played their pieces. In many lessons students concentrate well and are able to work for prolonged periods, especially when lessons are broken down into different episodes and each episode contains different types of work.

Students enjoy coming to college and respect each other and their teachers. They have very good social and interpersonal skills. Students have a wide variety of opportunities to take part in sports and said the college helped them to keep fit.

Students have a highly developed understanding of moral issues and they demonstrate a strong spiritual awareness in their consideration of emotions and beliefs. Very good displays show students' sense of pride in their work, environment and college. Students make an excellent contribution to the local community; they are well respected and keen to support different groups within the town. The annual Flora dance is for many the highlight of the year. They also enjoy opportunities to take part in wide variety of other cultural activities, including musical and drama productions, and the college jazz orchestra has national recognition. Well above average attendance, along with excellent work-related skills and attitudes, ensures that the college prepares students very well for the future. The proportion of students who are not in education, employment or training after they have left college is very low.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers know their students well and relationships are very good. In the best lessons questioning is used well to engage students and to assess how well they have learnt. Teaching assistants are very effective in lessons: they support students skilfully so that it is the students who do the work. Because lessons are engaging, behaviour is very good which means that teachers can be more imaginative and creative with activities. When teaching and learning are less effective students do not get down to their tasks quickly and do not know what they need to do to improve their written work.

The curriculum meets students' needs, interests and aspirations very well. It includes suitable vocational courses, such as working with small animals, which students enjoy and which meet local needs. The specialist area has enhanced the use of modern technologies in lessons. There is a good variety of college clubs and an excellent range of visits and trips enlivens the curriculum. Students enjoy the after-college support available and also activities like working with stained glass.

The college takes very good care of all its students and tailors support to their individual needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Staff use assessment information very well to identify how well students are doing and, when appropriate, they intervene by providing additional support. The pastoral curriculum provides very good support for students' emotional and behavioural needs and helps students to become mature and thoughtful

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young people. The college uses and coordinates outside agencies very effectively to provide good specialised support. Students say that the college informs and supports them well prior to arriving at the college, when they make choices at the end of Year 9 and before leaving or going on to the sixth form.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection the headteacher, very well supported by senior leaders, has made significant changes. Their outstanding leadership has meant that the ambition of the college has increased significantly and staff have been challenged to raise students aspirations and levels of attainment. Targets now incorporate more challenge and students respond well. Staff share the college's vision and ambition and are highly motivated to carry on the improvements. The overwhelming majority of staff who submitted their questionnaires agreed that they knew what the college was trying to achieve and that they were involved in bringing about improvements. These responses are testament to how effective leaders have been in motivating and supporting staff. The college works very well with other local colleges and external agencies, not least within the developing foundation trust.

The governing body is very supportive of the college and has well-defined and effective committees. Governors meticulously analyse data to challenge the college. The college gives very good support to the local community and works well with its partners. Safeguarding is a very high priority and the college does all it possibly can to ensure the safety of the students. Community cohesion is good and students have a very good understanding of local and global issues. For example, those who went on the rugby tour of South Africa were able to share their experience of meeting street children with their peers. The college has recently identified an opportunity to work with a school in Birmingham to enhance students' understanding of multicultural Britain, which it rightly identifies to be in need of further development.

The college's very comprehensive analysis of examination data to identify the underachievement of any individuals or groups and the action subsequently taken are witness to the success of a commitment to equality of opportunity. The large proportion of students who come from service families are well supported and those students who travel to college on buses are able to take part in extra-curricular activities because the college organises transport home. The college provides outstanding value for money, given the outstanding outcomes.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The outstanding sixth form has a very purposeful ethos and students thoroughly enjoy their studies, making excellent progress to achieve their potential. Attendance is very high and relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students develop very good social and learning skills. Levels of attainment are improving and are now above average. Students follow appropriate courses at different levels and there are good partnerships with other colleges. For example, some groups complete A-level courses which prepare them very well for higher education; others complete courses in construction or motor vehicles which prepare them very well for employment. Many work placements result in students taking up full-time employment before the course has ended. There are increasing numbers who are going on to higher education and the range of universities enrolling Helston students is extending.

Some successful subjects such as photography attract large numbers of students and care is taken to ensure that these options form part of a balanced programme. Students' involvement in supporting younger students is well planned but has yet to be fully implemented. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers expect students to attain highly and they work hard to help them, using a variety of strategies including new technologies. Students are confident and appreciate the very good help and advice they receive. As one student said, 'The college tries really hard, they are very supportive. If you have a problem they will help you out.' Others expressed similar views.

Outstanding leaders and managers ensure that students achieve excellent outcomes. Assessment information is used effectively to set challenging targets and to monitor students' progress towards them. Any underachievement is quickly identified through rigorous and sympathetic monitoring, which is highly valued by students.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of responses to questionnaires was very high and showed that parents and carers are pleased with the college. A high proportion agreed that their children enjoy college and that they felt safe, with a very large majority agreeing that they are happy with their children's experience at college. Less favourable areas included the way in which the college takes note of suggestions and concerns.

A few parents commented upon individual issues. These included the safety of students as they cross the road and also that discipline was too strict. All areas of concern were discussed with the college by inspectors and the headteacher will take them into account. The headteacher is also keen to find out why the college's support for healthy lifestyles was rated lower than other areas of its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Helston Community 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 862 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,586 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	313	36	495	57	39	5	11	1
The school keeps my child safe	271	31	557	65	20	2	3	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	274	32	509	59	48	6	3	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	261	30	526	61	34	4	8	1
The teaching is good at this school	225	26	571	66	30	3	4	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	194	23	522	61	100	12	13	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	162	19	560	65	100	12	16	2
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)	274	32	491	57	46	5	6	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	213	25	562	65	52	6	8	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	206	24	520	60	74	9	16	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	137	16	544	63	81	9	27	3
The school is led and managed effectively	229	27	543	63	47	5	12	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	306	35	506	59	31	4	2	0

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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



5 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Helston Community College, Helston TR13 8NR

When I visited your college recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with your excellent behaviour and manners and your very good contribution to the life of the college and the local community. You told us that you really enjoy college and this is one reason why we judge your college to be outstanding.

You make good progress. Results in your GCSE examinations have improved a lot and are above average. We saw some very interesting lessons and judged that teaching is good. In order for the college to get even better, we have recommended that teachers give you more opportunities to work together or independently. We have also said that marking needs to be more informative. You have very good relationships with staff and lessons are challenging. The excellent curriculum enables all of you to achieve well and almost all of you said in the questionnaire that the college prepares you well for the future. When we met you, you said that you could take part in lots of sport and that the college made sure you kept healthy, but your questionnaire responses indicated that you thought the college could do more. Could you please let the headteacher know, through the college council, exactly what the college can do to improve this area?

Staff support and care for you very well. They help you settle at the start of Year 7 and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education when you leave. Most of you said you felt safe and we have asked the college to work with the council to try and improve your safety when you walk between sites.

Your headteacher and other staff have made a very concerted effort to ensure all of you get the best possible education. We judge that they are getting more and more successful at this and that they have shown that Helston should get even better in the future. We wish you well at this outstanding college of which you are justifiably proud.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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