

Thomas Bennett Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126075
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	360002
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1253
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Bates
Headteacher	Ms Y Maskatiya
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 42 lessons, observing 42 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, current students and an ex-student. They evaluated students' attainment over three years, schemes of work, policies, the college improvement plan and reports from the School Improvement Partner. They considered 118 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers and 159 responses to the students' questionnaire.

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

- How effective are strategies to raise standards, especially in mathematics.
- How effective leaders and managers are in disseminating and embedding best practice in assessment and the use of information about students' progress to plan lessons.
- What the impact of the sports specialism is on provision and outcomes for individuals and groups of students. What the impact of the sports specialism is on provision and outcomes for individuals and groups of students.

Information about the school

Thomas Bennett is a larger-than-average secondary school, with an expanding sixth form. While the majority of students are of White British heritage, students from Asian, African and 'other white' groups make up about a fifth of the student population and 14% speak English as an additional language. The proportion of those known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly above the national average. Over half of the students are currently identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, most of which relate to their behavioural, social and emotional development. The college has a specialist unit for students on the autistic disorder spectrum, and a higher than average proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. A higher than average number of students joins the college part way through the year.

◆ The college gained specialist status for sport in 2003 and also holds the Sportsmark, Gold Artsmark, SSA inclusion mark, Becta quality mark and School Achievement awards.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

A confident and vigorously presented sense of purpose and outstanding care for students and staff as individuals underpin the good quality of education provided by the college. Thomas Bennett has improved significantly since its last inspection. Leaders and managers have created a climate of self-belief and high expectations. Their evaluation of strengths and areas for further development is well grounded and accurate. Strategies to eliminate weaknesses in teaching, to enhance the professional skills of teachers and support staff and to establish good learning habits among students are driving sustainable improvement. Improvements to provision are now well embedded. The capacity for further improvement is good. Students now achieve well and attainment, although low, is rising rapidly, a pattern which is mirrored in the sixth form. Progress made by students in English and by those on the School Action programme is outstanding, significantly stronger than the national average. One parent commented, 'I feel this school is excellent at encouraging and motivating children to achieve their potential.'

Equality of opportunity and an exceptional commitment to the success of every individual, irrespective of their starting points, are at the heart of college life. The substantial number of students who join the college in the course of the school year, some transferred from other local schools, are given the support and guidance they need to settle quickly and make progress. All students feel extremely safe and well supported. They have justified confidence in the guidance they are given. Those identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully integrated within the college's mainstream provision. Their good or, in many cases, outstanding progress and steady development as confident members of the college community reflect the good skills demonstrated by teaching and support staff and the positive attitudes of fellow students. Students' response to opportunities to contribute to the college's development is outstanding. The student voice is well respected and influential and students in all year groups willingly take on responsibilities.

Teaching has improved since the last inspection and most, including that in the sixth form, is now good, with some that is outstanding. Senior leaders are tackling areas of weakness effectively through whole-staff training, carefully-targeted coaching and the modelling of good practice. Detailed and systematic analysis of information about students' attainment is used meticulously to track progress. However, this information on individual students' learning needs is not yet used consistently to tailor activities that match the range of students' abilities and learning styles. There are areas where marking and well-developed opportunities for students to consolidate their understanding by reflecting on their own work and that of others are exceptionally productive. The challenge provided for more-able students is uneven across the school, as is the planning of activities which allow students to be actively and vocally engaged in their learning. Whereas much group work is productive, on occasions individuals dominate, allowing others to remain passive. There is

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a tendency for teachers to direct discussion too firmly, limiting the scope of students' independent thinking. Senior leaders recognise that these are areas for development and they are monitoring classroom practice routinely to ensure that improvements are comprehensive and consistent. This monitoring, however, does not always give a sufficiently detailed picture of current practice.

Links with schools overseas, for example in Mauritius, and around the United Kingdom, for instance in London and Dorset, complement the outstanding work to promote community cohesion done locally and in the college.

The sports specialism has made a very positive contribution to the college's development, enabling curriculum expansion, for example, with the introduction of BTEC courses, and improvements in staff training. In the wider community, the college is a hub for the development of sports' leadership.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements in attainment at all stages, including the sixth form, by:
 - using the college's extensive data to inform planning and to shape activities in lessons that challenge and support all students, including the most able.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - ensuring all students participate in well-planned and effectively managed group work
 - creating more opportunities for student-led discussion
 - actively disseminating the excellent practice that, in some departments, is driving outstanding progress
 - monitoring teaching more rigorously and in sufficient detail to ensure that subject leaders and teachers are clear about development priorities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment on entry in English, mathematics and science is well below average and literacy levels are low. From very low starting points, students make progress that is good overall and often outstanding. There is a sustained pattern of outstanding progress in English and rapid improvement in mathematics and science. Teachers and support staff share high expectations for all students, including the most vulnerable. Almost all students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress and progress for a significant number is outstanding, particularly those on the School Action programme, thanks to a combination of carefully-targeted teaching and excellent specialist support. Students show pride in their work and an enthusiasm for learning. Their growing self-belief is a significant factor in their good achievement.

Students are well informed about how to stay safe and say that they feel extremely safe at school. They know who to go to if they have concerns and feel confident, as do their parents, that any issues will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Students behave well in

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lessons, showing consideration and respect for one another, although some are a little boisterous between lessons. Their commitment to good behaviour is evident in the falling number of temporary exclusions and in there having been no permanent exclusions for the last three years. The sports specialism has contributed well to students' understanding of the benefits of physical activity although students feel that the college could do more to help them to lead healthy lifestyles. They enthusiastically embrace a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the wider community, working, for example, as junior sports leaders and raising funds for charitable causes. Sixth formers are particularly good role models in the support they give to younger students in the college and the work they do with pupils in local primary schools. Students know that they help shape the college's development because teachers listen to them and act on their views. For example, they took a lead role in the writing and implementation of the behaviour policy. Students rightly appreciate the opportunities they are given to develop workplace skills and to learn from links with local businesses although their literacy and numeracy skills are still relatively limited. They demonstrate good social skills and show respect for those with different learning needs or cultural traditions. Attendance is above average.

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	4
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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?

Most teaching displays excellent subject knowledge and a passion for learning. In the best lessons, students respond thoughtfully and with commitment to challenging questions and

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high expectations. Good teaching in the sixth form has a focus on individualised learning and presents appropriate challenge to most students, but not always to the most able. Teachers use information and communication technology well to enliven lessons and provide visual support for learning. Rigorous and accurate tracking systems give teachers detailed information about students so that individual strengths and weaknesses are well understood. Where learning is satisfactory, however, it is because activities in lessons are not well adapted to meet the full range of learning needs. The pace is sometimes too slow or too much time is allowed for activities, so that progress is restricted, particularly for more able learners. Teachers have good questioning skills and regularly check students' understanding. Students are developing useful habits of self- and peer-assessing, which is helping them to become more independent learners. ♦♦

The curriculum is appropriately focused on driving up attainment in English, mathematics and science while also providing a breadth of learning experiences. The well-planned 'Think Time' project in Year 7 is supporting the development of literacy and independent learning skills. Alternative and vocational qualifications motivate students not at ease with the mainstream curriculum, helping them to develop leadership and workplace skills. Visiting speakers provide curriculum enrichment, such as the 'Learn to Earn' and 'Beliefs' days. The small number of students who speak English as an additional language receives carefully-targeted and effective teaching. One said that this school, 'had given him everything he could possibly need' to help him develop his English. Provision for gifted and more able students is not yet fully developed but is improving and is enhanced by targeted activities such as visits to high-ranking universities. Senior leaders rightly describe the college as 'unrelenting' in its efforts to ensure the success of every individual. The Base provides highly personalised and effective support for students with a range of complex needs and is, rightly, highly valued. Meticulous planning ensures a smooth transition from Year 6 and careful attention is paid to the needs of students arriving during the school year so that they quickly settle and make progress.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her senior team have been extremely successful in developing an inclusive and increasingly aspirational culture. They have tackled key areas of weakness effectively, driving significant improvements since the last inspection. They set challenging targets and staff are held accountable for improving outcomes for all students, including those with complex learning needs. The monitoring of teaching and learning is good, but is not sufficiently detailed in providing information to ensure that priorities for

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improvement are as fully understood and effectively acted upon by all middle leaders and teachers as by the senior team.

Governors know the college well and provide robust challenge and support for improvement. They have ensured, along with the headteacher, that procedures for safeguarding students are good. The innovative 'Learn2gether' programme has improved parents' capacity to support learning at home and increased their understanding of the curriculum.

The college makes extensive and effective use of partnerships to support learning and to promote students' well-being. The college-based Community Support Officer is held in high regard by students. Links with other schools have enhanced students' understanding of contexts very different to their own and the college's leading role in community sports partnerships has further enhanced the contribution the specialism makes to the academic progress and personal development of students in the college.

An exceptionally well-directed commitment to equality of opportunity lies at the heart of everything the college does. There is continual monitoring by senior leaders of the achievement of individuals and groups and action is taken immediately if there is any evidence of slippage. The college has a keen understanding of the social, cultural and religious diversity of its own community and has great success in developing national and international links, such as sports coaching with a school in Mauritius, hosting Danish students and working with the charity 'Free the Children'. Students demonstrate a strong understanding of their own college as a highly cohesive community and show a determination to maintain it as such. A careful audit is made of all elements of community cohesion so that good practice is evaluated and reinforced.

Improvements in attainment and students' good overall achievement indicate that resources are well deployed to give good value for money.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make good progress because of well-developed strategies to support them in their learning. Outcomes are strongest for those on vocational courses and currently are better at A level than at AS level. The majority of teaching is good and is best where students are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning, supported by teachers' excellent subject knowledge. Where teaching is satisfactory, it is because expectations, especially of the more-able students, are not high enough and the range of learning opportunities is too limited. Students can confidently discuss with staff their strengths and weaknesses and how they will achieve their target grades. Retention rates in the sixth form are improving, due partly to the wider range of courses now available, some building on the success of the sports specialism. Students make an extensive contribution to the college and wider community, for example through community service, sport and literacy support. Leaders and managers of the sixth form closely monitor student well-being and achievement and provide a detailed programme of activities to prepare students well for the future. Only one leaver last year did not enter further education or employment.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A small proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire. Most of those responding feel that Thomas Bennett keeps their children safe, provides good teaching and is led and managed well. A few commented that communication with parents could be improved. Most feel that the college deals effectively with poor behaviour. One parent expressed overall dissatisfaction with this aspect, although inspectors found no evidence to support this view during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Bennett 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 118 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1253 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	33	71	60	4	3	4	3
The school keeps my child safe	54	46	60	51	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	49	42	63	53	5	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	37	66	56	6	5	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	38	32	77	65	0	0	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	36	68	58	5	4	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	27	79	67	5	4	2	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)	37	31	72	61	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	44	37	66	56	2	2	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	31	66	56	7	6	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	31	70	59	4	3	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	55	47	55	47	1	1	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	56	47	55	47	2	2	3	3

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.



10 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Bennett Community College, Crawley RH10 5AD

Thank you for making our recent visit such an enjoyable experience. We were very impressed with the pride you showed in your work and in the college.

Thomas Bennett is a good college and improving strongly. Attainment by the end of Year 11 is low but improving. You enjoy learning and are making good and sometimes outstanding progress. You show great respect for one another and for your teachers and behave well in your lessons and around the college most of the time.

Your teachers and other staff know you well and take care to help each of you succeed. Those of you who sometimes need extra help are very well supported by staff and by your fellow students. You take full advantage of the many opportunities provided by the carefully-planned curriculum. You are also very good at putting your views into practice to help improve the college. We were particularly impressed that you took responsibility for writing your own behaviour policy. As one of you told us, taking on greater responsibility as you go through college is, 'a good way of learning to be older'. The excellent care you receive enables you to feel safe and supported and to make progress.

In order to keep up this encouraging rate of improvement, we have asked the headteacher and her staff to improve your attainment further by:

- planning more varied activities in lessons to make sure that all of you make good progress
- giving you more opportunities to discuss your learning, and ensuring that all of you contribute actively to group work
- helping all who teach you to adopt the ways in which the most effective teachers challenge you to raise your standards.

You can help by having high expectations and taking every opportunity to fulfil them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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