

Coombeshead College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number113522Local AuthorityDevonInspection number363808

Inspection dates2-3 March 2011Reporting inspectorIan Hodgkinson HMI

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

Type of school

School category

Age range of pupils

Gender of pupils

Gender of pupils in the sixth form

Number of pupils on the school roll

Of which, number on roll in the sixth form

Comprehensive

Comprehensive

Mixed

11–18

Mixed

Mixed

1296

238

Appropriate authorityThe governing bodyChairCarole WilliamsHeadteacherMatthew ShanksDate of previous school inspection2 March 2010

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majestys Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 40 teachers and 41 lessons, and dropped in briefly on other activities. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and students. Inspectors looked at documentation, including students books, the college monitoring and action plans, records of assessment and tracking of students progress. In addition, inspectors considered 90 questionnaire responses from parents and carers, together with those from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the colleges work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

Students achievement: in particular how successful has the college been in raising attainment in mathematics, and in overcoming weaker progress for key groups of students, especially those known to be eligible for free school meals.

The success of the college in promoting consistently good or better teaching.

The degree of improvement in teachers use of assessment information, both to plan work well matched to students needs and to show students how to improve.

Whether students attendance has improved and is now at least within the average range.

The factors explaining the sharp improvement in outcomes for sixth form students in 2010, and whether these improvements have been sustained.

Information about the school

Coombeshead College is a large school serving the town of Newton Abbot and surrounding area. Numbers on roll have declined markedly, by nearly 200 students over three years. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. A higher than average percentage of students has special educational needs and/or disabilities, including an above-average proportion with statements of special educational needs. Students with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities are served by the college.

The college has been a training school for trainee teachers and a specialist school for media arts since 2002. It has also attained an International School Award. The college acquired Trust Status in 2008. It operates a sixth form partnership with two other schools. At the time of its last inspection the college was given a notice to improve the attainment and progress of its students. The headteacher was appointed shortly after the last inspection in April 2010.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majestys Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Coombeshead is a rapidly improving college that offers its students a satisfactory quality of education. It has a good sixth form, where students achieve well. Through the exceptionally clear direction of the headteacher, aspirations have been raised throughout the college, leading to significant improvements in students attainment and progress. There remain variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the college. However, staff have welcomed the dialogue that has resulted from their strengthened accountability for students progress, and are actively collaborating to support each other in improving the quality of provision. Leaders and managers at all levels have been successfully empowered to play an effective role in college evaluation and improvement. The college has a good capacity to improve further.

Students are strongly involved in contributing to college improvement. The college council has played an active role in reshaping key aspects of college life, such as the uniform, college day and enrichment programmes. The new prefect system involving Year 10 and Year 11 students is drawing on and developing the leadership qualities which students across the college readily demonstrate in a broad range of activities. Students outstanding contribution to the life of the college and the wider community is a reflection of the positive ethos which prevails. Students play an active role in the wide range of enrichment activities on offer to them. They feel safe in a college which takes good care of them. Students behaviour has improved since the last inspection, and in many lessons they are guided to work effectively as individuals and in groups to independently tackle challenging problems. This was a key feature of the significant proportion of lessons seen on the inspection over a fifth in which teaching and learning were judged outstanding. In a minority of lessons, however, activities are dull and lacking in challenge, and in a few cases teachers tolerate discourteous behaviour for too long before applying college behaviour strategies. Where this occurs, low-level disruption distracts students from their learning.

Results in GCSE examinations improved sharply overall in 2010. Results in mathematics, however, did not improve at the rate of other subjects and too many students did not reach the grade they should. Intensive efforts to reshape the mathematics curriculum and to offer students strongly focused support have led to general improvements in mathematics provision, with Year 11 now on course to attain results close to the national average in 2011. The college has developed new systems to track the progress of most groups of students very effectively, and uses this information to intervene where students are underachieving. For example, it has identified that too many students known to be eligible for free school meals underachieve, and has shaped a number of programmes to engage more effectively with these students and their families which are beginning to

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

show success. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in line with their peers. Nonetheless, procedures to measure, monitor and plan to develop the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities lack precision, and support strategies are not reviewed regularly enough to provide helpful information for staff, parents and carers.

The college media arts specialism has a very positive impact, on performance and participation in the specialist subjects, and on the colleges links with the wider community. Extensive partnerships with other local schools, colleges, businesses and external agencies underpin the broad programme of curricular and enrichment opportunities available to students.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students attainment and progress, especially in mathematics and especially for those eligible for free school meals.
- Secure consistently good or better teaching across the college by:
 - ensuring that the exemplary methods used by teachers in some lessons are widely shared and used by all staff
 - ensuring that teachers consistently use assessment information to plan challenging work which is well matched to students capabilities
 - ensuring that teaching methods in all subjects are lively, vibrant, and build on the independent learning skills which students demonstrate so well in many lessons and activities
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations for students behaviour and employ consistent behaviour management strategies.
- Refine and strengthen procedures to measure and monitor the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students attainment on entry to the college is broadly average. Attainment has risen sharply in many subjects following the last inspection, and on a number of key measures, including the proportion of students getting five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, attainment is broadly average. While attainment rose strongly in English and science in 2010 GCSE examinations, improvement was sluggish in mathematics where some underachievement persisted. Overall, students academic progress improved significantly, and particularly that of boys whose attainment rose markedly to close the gap with girls. Students known to be eligible for free school meals have underachieved at GCSE for some years, and continue to do so, although the latest college data indicate an improved picture for current cohorts, reflecting early success of college strategies to engage more effectively with these students and their families. Students current learning and progress are satisfactory overall but vary widely according to the quality of teaching. Learning in specialist subjects including art and drama is often

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

outstanding, although challenging attainment targets were not met in all areas in 2010. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory, and boosted by teaching assistants who keep a careful check on their learning and participation in lessons but who are prepared to step back from constant intervention in order to better promote students independence.

The outstanding contribution which students make to the college and wider community helps to develop very effective teamworking and leadership skills. Through well-organised links with businesses and other organisations promoted by the specialism, and through good careers, enterprise, environmental and industrial awareness promoted through many subjects including examples seen by inspectors in technology and geography students are well prepared for later life. Students attendance has improved steadily, and the proportion of students who are persistently absent has dropped sharply. Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy through a well-developed programme of personal, social and health education supplemented by focused impact days. Participation in extracurricular sport and other challenging physical activity is good, and physical education lessons are of a high calibre although curriculum time is short. Students show a good understanding of the world around them, and participate enthusiastically in international link programmes and charitable work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning			
Taking into account:	3		
Pupils' attainment ¹	3		
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3		
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress			
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2		
Pupils' behaviour	3		
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	2		
their future economic well-being	2		
Taking into account:	3		
Pupils' attendance ¹	3		
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

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection but still varies between and within subjects. The outstanding lessons seen during the inspection in art, drama, technology, and physical education in the main school and English, mathematics and photography in the sixth form were characterised by high pace and engaging activities which were planned to challenge students of all capabilities in the class. Teachers questions in these lessons were often probing and targeted to draw in those students less inclined to respond. In the minority of lessons which were satisfactory or inadequate, there were some shortcomings in the pace of learning, most often because individuals or groups of students found the lessons uninteresting or the tasks too easy. Teachers are generally using assessment information to identify students varying needs and capabilities, but not all yet plan work which is differentiated to reflect such variations. The quality of teachers feedback to students is improving with some very strong examples at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There are still a few examples, particularly for lower attaining students, where marking comments are minimal and books have too much incomplete work.

The curriculum has key strengths in its breadth of provision. In developing the curriculum the college has been keen to ensure that it gets the right student on the right course. The colleges own curriculum and enrichment programme is broad and diverse, incorporating strong provision for the creative and performing arts. In addition, it works closely with partner schools and colleges locally to widen academic and vocational pathways for students. However, there remains a legacy of difficulties that arose from timetable arrangements to block out long periods of time for students to engage in one-year GCSE courses at Key Stage 4 and to move between partner institutions: in some academic subjects in particular, students interest in learning wanes by the end of a double- or treble- period. The college recognises this issue and is working to resolve it.

The college works effectively with external agencies, parents and carers to safeguard the well-being of students and promote better attendance. Looked-after children and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given strong pastoral support through the student services base, and students feel confident to drop in regularly to get access to the services offered. Strong induction procedures are in place to help Year 7 students to settle well, and students receive good guidance on their options as they move through the college. Methods for evaluating the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the success of strategies to support them are underdeveloped. The progress of these students is not reviewed regularly enough, and too few have clear and up-to-date individual education plans to set out and review strategies for support.

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

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The inspirational headteacher and very effective senior leadership team have successfully ensured that all groups of stakeholders staff, governors, students, parents and carers have been highly supportive of college improvement in a determined response to the last inspection report. Accountability for student performance has strengthened markedly through better evaluation and sharing of performance and progress data. Leadership and management of the quality of teaching and learning have been dynamic, and staff have been highly constructive and reflective in response to closer scrutiny of all aspects of their work. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in driving improvement within their own subjects and through burgeoning programmes to share good practice in teaching and learning across the college. Self-evaluation at all levels is strengthening, and while improvements are yet to be fully embedded in all areas, a strong framework is being established through line management and subject reviews.

The role of the governing body has strengthened as its members are now able to use a much better flow of performance information to hold the college to account. Leadership of the governing body has a very sharp understanding of the colleges strengths and weaknesses and maintains close scrutiny of the colleges work and its development. Procedures to secure the safety and well-being of staff and students are effective and safeguarding requirements are fully met. In spite of the falling rolls, which had been accelerated by previous weaknesses in the colleges quality of education, the college has taken decisive action to overcome a budget deficit while securing significant improvements in outcomes for students.

The college promotes community cohesion well, drawing on a very strong network of links in the local and global community. It recognises that more could be done to promote students awareness of life in more culturally diverse parts of the United Kingdom. The college strongly counters discrimination, and students note that incidents of bullying and oppressive behaviour are rare. The effectiveness of the use of performance data in monitoring the relative performance of groups of students to ensure that all have equal opportunity to succeed has strengthened, but while gaps are closing, some variation remains.

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

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement		
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	3	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2	
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3	

Sixth form

Students attainment and progress have improved strongly and consistently over the last three years and achievement across all qualification types academic, vocational and applied is good. While Coombeshead offers mainly, though not exclusively, level 3 academic courses on its site, its partnership with neighbouring schools and colleges ensures that a wide range of options are available to its students. The quality of teaching is good, and students learn well. Teachers have strong subject knowledge, and use very effective methods to challenge students to learn and think independently, even where classes are small. Students receive clear feedback on their progress and how to improve.

The new, very effective team providing leadership of the sixth form has strengthened monitoring procedures to ensure that students targets are consistently challenging and better support their progress. Students speak highly of the quality of the information and guidance they receive from their tutors and sixth form leaders. Guidance on higher education options is a particular strength, and the college works hard at raising students aspirations, with three students this year being offered Oxbridge places. Students enjoy their education. Their attendance is rigorously monitored, although weaker attendance of a few students impedes their progress. Students take leadership of a range of college and community activities, including the mentoring of students in the main school, through the V50 programme in which they are expected to volunteer their time. Wednesday afternoon games activities encourage students to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	
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

The level of return to the Ofsted questionnaire was well-below average. Many of those who responded wrote to inspectors to praise the impact of the leadership of the new headteacher, especially, as one wrote, on the significant improvements to school discipline. Most feel their children are safe in college, and two wrote to praise the effectiveness with which the college dealt with bullying. However, a small but significant minority of parents still have concerns about students behaviour. Inspectors found that behaviour has improved since the last inspection and that students are polite and courteous around the college site. Nevertheless, disruptive behaviour does still adversely affect learning in a small minority of lessons where the teaching does not engage the students or where the teacher does not manage behaviour effectively. A few parents and carers wrote to express concerns about the poor state of toilet facilities. Inspectors found that the headteacher was also of the view that the condition of the toilets was unacceptable, and was endeavouring to find resources to upgrade these. A very small minority of parents and carers do not feel that communications between college and home are always effective. Inspectors found that the college was strengthening communications with parents in a variety of ways, for example by more regular reporting of progress, by the use of the parent focus group, and by broadening methods of communication.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Coombeshead 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 90 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1296 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	18	62	69	7	8	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	17	19	62	69	6	7	2	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	22	24	55	61	9	10	4	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	18	59	66	14	16	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	7	8	68	76	9	10	3	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	6	61	67	17	19	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	9	63	70	12	13	3	3
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)	10	11	60	67	7	8	5	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	11	65	72	8	9	4	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	13	47	52	15	17	7	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	9	54	60	12	13	7	8
The school is led and managed effectively	27	30	50	56	8	9	4	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	21	60	67	6	7	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)						
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate			
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3			
Primary schools	9	44	39	7			
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11			
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3			
Special schools	35	43	17	5			
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9			
All schools	13	43	37	8			

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and	l 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: 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.

■ 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.



7 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Coombeshead College, Newton Abbot TQ12 1PT

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the college for its recent inspection. It was good to hear about the increasing role that students are taking in making the college a better place to learn and work. We judge that you are making an outstanding contribution to the college and wider community.

You and your parents and carers told us how much the college had improved since the last inspection, under the leadership of the new headteacher. Leaders and managers have worked effectively with teachers and other staff to improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum. This is evident in your improved learning in class and rising results in GCSE examinations. The college now provides you with a satisfactory quality of education and inspectors have removed its notice to improve. The sixth form is good and its students achieve well.

While the college has made significant improvements, our inspection report indicates a number of areas for further development. Firstly, students attainment and progress has not risen evenly in all areas, and there is a need for this to strengthen further, for example in mathematics. Secondly, the quality of teaching still varies widely between lessons. We have asked the college to ensure that best practice is shared widely among teachers, and that teachers plan engaging lessons which build on the independent learning skills you show in the most outstanding lessons. Thirdly, the way the progress of those of you with special educational needs and/or disabilities is monitored needs to be refined and strengthened to further support your progress.

I am sure that you will all continue to play your part in the colleges rapid improvement by working hard and continuing to make such a positive contribution. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson Her Majestys Inspector



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