

St Neots Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110878
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	363322
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	865
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Hyde
Headteacher	Robert Whatmough (Executive Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2009
School address	Barford Road Eynesbury, St Neots PE19 2SH
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Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
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Registered Childcare provision	Little Acorns Nursery
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	54
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	Not previously inspected

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. St Neots Community College was found to require special measures in March 2009. The school was visited by HMI on four previous occasions in September 2009, March 2010, June 2010 and November 2010.

The inspection team observed 36 lessons, taught by 36 teachers or higher level teaching assistants. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, nominated staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and met with groups of students.

- The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.
- The nature of the academic standards secured and the current rate of students' progress.
- How successfully the school is improving the quality of teaching in order to ensure consistently good progress for all students.
- The effectiveness of target-setting and tracking procedures in helping to eliminate underachievement.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in developing capacity for sustained improvement and overcoming the barriers to good progress.
- The impact of the new federation arrangements on the quality of provision.

Information about the school

The Longsands Learning Partnership, a federation between Longsands College and St Neots Community College, became operational from 1 September 2010. St Neots Community College gained foundation status on that day and the Principal of Longsands College became the Executive Principal. A federation governing body became operational on 1 September, assuming responsibility for both colleges.

St Neots Community College is smaller than the average secondary school and draws students from the southern and western sides of the town. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national figure and so is the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language.

The proportion of students registered by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national figure and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is nearly twice the national average, the largest groups having moderate or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. There are a few children who are looked after by the local authority.

The college has specialist status in the performing arts; it achieved the Artsmark gold award in 2007 and was awarded the Sportsmark in 2009.

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?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

In less than two terms since the college became part of the Longsands Learning Partnership, the senior management team has raised expectations and attainment, enhanced students' progress, significantly improved teaching, improved behaviour and attendance and established a positive relationship with parents and carers.

Attainment for individuals and groups is rising and students currently make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The 2010 GCSE examinations took place before the reorganisation of the college and the change of leadership was secured. Equality of opportunity is now good, students speak highly of the assertive mentoring programme and the positive impact it has had on their educational opportunities and progress. The small number of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds progress as well as their peers. However, vulnerable students and those who find learning difficult often make good progress as a result of the effective 'Opening Minds' programme and the range of individual mentoring available.

The new federation arrangements have helped to secure a robust assessment programme and effective care, guidance and support programmes across the college. Current behaviour is good, a factor also noted by HMI in the previous monitoring letter and attendance is in line with the national average. These two aspects of the college represent a significant improvement on the situation at the last inspection. Safeguarding arrangements are good.

The quality of teaching is good and has improved significantly in the last year. Lessons are now well planned to meet the students' learning needs; the rate of students' progress is now good because of the improvements secured in teaching. The work of the higher-level teaching assistants has been a constant strength of provision in the last year. The use of assessment to enhance learning is good and is often a strength of the effective teaching seen during this inspection; teaching has improved notably in the last two terms. The curriculum is satisfactory with appropriate changes already planned for the next academic year.

Governance is good and the governing body showed significant strategic vision and courage in supporting the local authority's proposals for a federation of the two schools in the town. The local authority's support for these developments has been well considered and of high quality. The new governing body took up responsibility for both schools in September 2010 and has encouraged senior staff to build complementary structures and procedures in both schools while maintaining the best features of each school.

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The onsite Early Years Foundation Stage provision is good overall with an effective mixture of structured play, free choice and language development. Outstanding leadership and management have driven forward the quality of this provision.

Sixth form provision is satisfactory overall with students making above average progress because of the significant improvements in teaching and learning secured in the last year. Students speak highly of the academic and pastoral support available post-16.

The reorganisation of leadership and management has embedded ambition and driven improvement in an outstanding manner. Leadership at all levels has been strengthened and the improvements secured in teaching, learning, attendance and behaviour have raised standards. Capacity to improve is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure higher levels of student progress and raise standards by:
 - ensuring that the emphasis on the needs of students and the pace of learning found where teaching is effective is available in all lessons
 - ensuring students are able to engage fully with appropriate courses by further development of an efficient and effective curriculum
 - implementing carefully targeted professional development to ensure that best practice in the management of learning is widely shared.
- Combine the effective pastoral system with assertive mentoring to:
 - raise aspirations and enhance the students understanding of how such aspirations may be fulfilled
 - offer additional opportunities for parents and carers to support and participate in their child's learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry has been well below average in recent years, although this is rising in the lower school. Standards at the end of Year 11 remained well below average in 2010. Provisional results secured from examinations taken early indicate that standards are rising and are already stronger than the previous year in English, mathematics and science. Vulnerable students and those on the assertive mentoring programme make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The progress made by those with special educational needs and/or difficulties has improved and is often good. Those who represent the traveller communities make good progress due to the focused support provided.

The students' current learning is good as a result of the improvements secured in teaching. Lesson outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In an outstanding French lesson, tasks were very well planned to allow students to absorb the language in a variety of ways that matched their learning needs effectively. Questioning was skilful, resources were used well and learning was driven forward at a brisk pace. The dialogue created around the students' response to homework was a powerful feature. Enjoyment and achievement is satisfactory, with strengths evident in individual achievement, attendance and behaviour.

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Students were very positive on 'feeling safe' and inspectors observed that excellent staff/student relationships supported this view. A good range of healthy school meals are available daily; the proportion of students engaged in sport is high and the school provides effective support for a healthy lifestyle. The students' contribution to the school and wider community is good, particularly within the performing arts specialism and the manner in which this is received locally. Overall, the range of workplace and other skills the students develop towards their future economic well-being are satisfactory. Significant improvement has been secured in the students' key skills.

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The moral and social maturity displayed by the students was particularly impressive.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
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	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. Three quarters of the sample of lessons observed were found to be good or better and all were satisfactory; a proportion that has risen steadily in the last two terms due to the hard work of all concerned and the effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching by senior staff.

The best teaching provides well-considered challenge to which students respond positively, progressing well and often engaging in focused peer-group discussion. For

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example, in a lower attaining Year 10 mathematics class, students created their own life-sized number line and then used it to determine the possibility of events happening. The same line was then adapted to form a probability scale to assign events and determine this probability as a fraction. Teachers plan their lessons carefully and assessment procedures, especially the use of attainment data, are used well to enable teachers to plan effectively. Teachers check students' understanding of their work frequently during lessons to review the learning and check progress; if necessary, they adjust their plans to meet the students' needs but this practice is not consistent enough to ensure that all students make good progress. Assessment and tracking systems are now more robust and are sufficiently embedded in most teachers' practice to support students' learning. The improved behaviour and attitudes of students make a positive contribution to learning in the majority of lessons.

The curriculum is improving; it meets the needs of most learners and provides appropriate opportunities for progression. The college has recently made great efforts to increase the breadth of offer at Key Stage 4 and to improve the information, advice and guidance given to students to allow appropriate choices to be made. The provision is flexible and is reviewed and adjusted to meet individual needs. It has many strengths: the 'Opening Minds' programme at Key Stage 3 promotes the key skills as well as the personal development of targeted students; the Key Stage 4 curriculum has opened four possible learning pathways, ranging from the vocational to the academic; and the sixth form curriculum has been similarly strengthened and includes courses at all levels. Early entry is now possible and highly-effective partnerships are being forged within the federation in order to provide an even wider range of opportunities, cost effectively. The recent introduction of some of these curriculum improvements means that they will take time to have a full impact on student achievement.

The college cares sensitively for students with a wide range of needs as well as for those whose personal circumstances make them vulnerable, and this reflects the college's inclusive approach. Case studies exemplify the effectiveness of the college in nurturing individual students back into education and the students themselves provide vivid testimony to the impact of the college's care, guidance and support systems. Well-organised transition arrangements support students entering the college; those in Year 9 selecting their future examination choices; and students in Year 11 when considering their post-16 education. Academic guidance has improved with the introduction of 'assertive mentoring'.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The pace of change secured and the manner in which delegated responsibility has been devolved and supported within the senior team has been the outstanding achievement.

The senior team has worked hard to ensure that the monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate and thorough. As a result, leaders have a clear understanding of ways in which teaching can be improved further and promote this improvement through effective support programmes tailored to closely meet the identified needs.

Governance is good and the governing body maintains a strong overview of standards and provision across the Longsands Learning Partnership. Engagement with parents and carers has improved as a result of the strong student support systems introduced. Community cohesion has a strong and improving local focus. The strength of the learning partnership and the manner in which the governing body, the Executive Principal and his team are developing the quality of provision are outstanding and underpin the college's good capacity to improve.

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	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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Little Acorns Nursery unit became part of the responsibilities of the governing body in June 2009 and provided effective provision at that time.

The manager has inspired the staff; all have a clear vision for improvement which is rooted in their desire to meet the needs of all children. The setting is highly inclusive and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early and effective intervention provided. There is very good use of external agencies and the nursery makes good use of the facilities available. Teaching and care are good with safeguarding and

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supervision excellent. Staff are continuing to: develop the introduction of phonics, particularly with boys; check that children understand the meaning of new words; and enhance the range of creative opportunities in order to strengthen the provision further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

Overall performance has improved significantly since the last inspection. Students are set realistic targets and standards are rising. The average points score per student has improved. Students attribute this to the consistent level of academic and pastoral support they receive from the sixth form team. Those applying for university speak highly of the support provided by their academic staff and their tutors.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Parental and carers' questionnaires are not normally distributed for monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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 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.



11 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of St Neots Community College, St Neots, PE19 2SH

As some of you will remember, I have visited your school five times in the last two years. During this time I have seen you respond positively to the improvements in teaching and the range of learning opportunities provided. I am pleased to say the inspection team judged behaviour to be good. Attendance has improved a great deal and is now in line with schools nationally; this is important to your future. Well done!

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. This is a real achievement that staff and students have secured together.

I have asked the school to focus on developing the curriculum opportunities provided to help you reach higher standards and make better progress. You spoke positively about the assertive mentoring and student support systems and I have asked the school to bring these two schemes closer together to help you make greater progress.

I look forward to hearing about your future progress.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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