

Cromwell Community College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110869
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	378195
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Lead inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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	1079
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Smy
Headteacher	Jed Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2008
School address	Wenny Road Chatteris PE16 6UU
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Alan Alder	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elizabeth Needham	Additional inspector
Pauline Hoyle	Additional inspector
Christine Murrell	Additional inspector
Aune Turkson-Jones	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The number of lessons observed, and the number of teachers seen, was 42. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two of its other members, several of the teaching staff who hold positions of responsibility, and groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and scrutinised the school's self-evaluations, and documents relating to the safeguarding of students, data concerning attendance, behaviour and students' academic performance, as well as 131 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is bigger than the average-sized secondary school. The sixth form is part of a consortium with another local school, though it is gradually teaching a greater number of the subjects that are on offer. The school has a specialism in the humanities.

The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is about half that found nationally. There is also a much lower proportion of students who are from minority ethnic groups and whose first language is not English. There is about the same proportion of students as there are nationally who are disabled or who have special educational needs. The school meets the current floor standard which sets the government's minimum expectations for the standards students reach by the end of Year 11.

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

Key findings

- This is a good school. Students’ achievement is good. They make faster progress than their peers nationally and their attainment is above average. Behaviour is good and attendance is above average.
- The school’s overall effectiveness is not outstanding because students’ learning is not outstanding. This, in part, is because there are not sufficient opportunities for students to work independently and to take more responsibility for their own learning. In addition, their understanding is not sufficiently tested during lessons so that areas of difficulty can be addressed, or more challenge provided.
- Teaching is good. Lessons have a good pace and teachers’ knowledge of their subjects is good. However, students have limited opportunities to speak at length to help improve their fluency and to formulate ideas to use in subsequent written tasks.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Lessons, and the school in general, are calm and orderly. Students have good relationships with their teachers and show respect to them and to other adults. Any poor behaviour is promptly dealt with.
- The sixth form is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress in their work and reach average standards. It is well led and is showing improvement. There are good systems in place to monitor students’ progress.
- The school is well led. The ambition to improve is strong and very clearly communicated to the staff and to students. Leaders at all levels are held well to account and the effectiveness of their work is frequently monitored. The self-evaluations that are carried out are thorough, accurate and used well to identify what further improvements are needed. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are good. Teaching is clearly improving as a result of regular monitoring and good quality support and advice. The curriculum is well-designed. It provides opportunities for students of different aptitudes and interests to make good progress, enabling those with weaknesses in literacy to improve them, and those who are high attainers to take additional subjects at GCSE.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the learning of all students, including those in the sixth form, further by:
 - ensuring that during lessons questions are asked to test the understanding of students of different ability so that any necessary clarifications can be given, or more challenge provided
 - giving students more opportunities to speak at length to explain their understanding of the work
 - providing students with more opportunities for group discussions to generate ideas for their extended writing
 - providing more opportunities for students to work independently or in collaborative groups.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students make good progress in their learning in the large majority of lessons. Most parents and carers who expressed a view agree with this. Students learn best when they are engaged in practical or creative activities. This is partly because in those lessons there is particularly effective monitoring of the progress students are making in their work, and this enables the teachers see that that the task has been understood. Students also learn best when they are given rapid advice on what to do to improve their work during the lesson. Good examples of this were observed in a variety of lessons including English, French, physical education and science. Some good self-assessment in a physical education lesson also resulted in students improving their performance well. They respond well to high expectations, as was observed in a mathematics lesson to do with algebraic expressions. They make least progress when too much time is spent repeating work that they are already familiar with and, while they might enjoy such work, it is not sufficiently challenging.

In the GCSE and equivalent examinations taken by students in 2011, the proportion who achieved five or more high grade GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was above the national average. In English, their attainment is significantly higher than average, as it has been in mathematics in two out of the last three years. The progress students have made in both English and mathematics, and overall, is good. All groups of students are making at least satisfactory progress. In 2011, students known to eligible for free school meals, disabled students and those who have special educational needs attained less highly than others. However, the former made progress that was above the national average and the latter's progress was in line with the national average. The indications from the school's current data and from lesson observations carried out by inspectors are that the gaps in attainment are narrowing.

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In the sixth form, the standards that students reach are in line with the national average and they make satisfactory progress.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good. A very large majority of parents and carers and students agree with this. The proportion of lessons that are inadequate is small. What characterises lessons is the strong commitment of teachers to help students to learn. It is revealed, for example, in the fact that little time is wasted, and the pace of lessons is good with students often given reminders of how much time they have to complete a task, which keeps them focused on it. Teachers are persistent in their pursuit of learning. A good example of this was seen in a low attaining French group in which students made good progress: the teacher was determined that they would all learn what was intended. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. There are some inconsistencies in teaching, however. For example, in some lessons questions are used well to assess and deepen students' understanding and to encourage analysis and evaluation. In an outstanding sixth form English lesson, there was very good questioning by the teacher that required an evaluation of different perspectives. This provoked thought and good, detailed, discussion by students. There was constant feedback from the teacher and the provision of further information that reinforced and extended learning. The result was that students made rapid progress. However, in some other lessons questioning is more related to recapping factual knowledge. It is not used to challenge or to assess understanding enough. The extent of independent and group work is also inconsistent, with teachers sometimes doing too much of the work for students. The use of phonics, the understanding of the sounds of letters, to aid reading and spelling is at an early stage. Nevertheless, lessons are enlivened by a good range of teaching strategies that engage students. Teaching assistants provide good support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Teaching reinforces aspects of social, moral, spiritual and cultural learning well. Several lessons, including an English, art and a psychology lesson developed empathy. Students are often helped to reflect on themselves and their own performance. The curriculum makes a good contribution to students' learning, though there are too infrequent opportunities for students to plan and carry out investigations in mathematics, in which they choose the mathematics they will use, and in science.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is good. A very large majority of parents and carers agree with this, as do a large majority of students. Students have a positive attitude to learning, with rare exceptions. They engage readily with the work they are doing and respond promptly to teachers' requests. Students say that little time is lost in lessons as a result of poor behaviour. While there is evidence that some bullying has occurred, students say that such matters are quickly dealt with, as do parents and carers. The number of exclusions has fallen in recent years. This year, despite the reintegration of students who were educated in alternative provision, the exclusion rate has not increased. Attendance is above average and the proportion of students who are

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persistently absent is below average. Students who receive additional support have lower attendance than their peers at school, though it is better than the same group nationally. Their attendance is improving. Punctuality to school and lessons is good.

A very large majority of students say that they feel safe in school, as does the same proportion of parents and carers. The observations made by inspectors confirm this. In those practical lessons in which there are potential hazards, teachers ensure that the school's policies on safety are followed. Students are also taught about how to avoid the potentially unsafe situations that may arise outside school.

Leadership and management

The school has improved since the previous inspection. Students' achievement, their attendance and behaviour have all improved well. The sixth form is improving too, and this is being helped by the system for tracking students' academic performance. Evidence provided by leaders demonstrates that teaching quality has improved in the last two years. Improvement has been brought about by a combination of high expectations of what can be achieved, frequent and accurate monitoring of the work of the school and effective steps to bring about improvements, with leaders being held to account. There are good arrangements now for monitoring the quality of the teaching sixth form students receive, including at the partner school. Students say that any concerns they have are acted upon. The governing body is well informed about the school. Its members are linked to specific areas which they visit to gain an understanding of any issues there are and to assess what is being done to bring about improvement. They provide a good level of challenge to the Principal. In turn, he monitors the work of his senior team at frequent intervals, as do its members with the leaders they manage. The capacity to improve is good.

A strong emphasis is being placed on developing the quality of teaching. This is evaluated by direct observation as well as scrutinies of students' work and an analysis of the progress they are making. Procedures for improving teaching are well considered and include joint planning and observations.

The curriculum provides well for the range of interest and aspirations of students. The curriculum of the main school and the sixth form are aligned so that a student taking a course in Year 11 has the opportunity to take the subject at a more advanced level in the sixth form. There are opportunities for early entry in some subjects at GCSE, with the students able to begin new subjects in Year 11. To compensate for some students' below-average writing or reading when they join the school, there are compensatory programmes. The assessments made show that students benefit from these. The day-to-day curriculum aids the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example through the ethics and philosophy course. A series of themed days also provides for this. The days also help students to develop an understanding of aspects of life in modern Britain, such as the democratic system. Some students attend off-site courses. These are monitored to ensure that they are of sufficient quality. Enrichment opportunities are a strength, being many and varied. They are mostly held at lunchtime or before

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school starts so that students who travel some distance to the school are not deterred from attending. Attendance at these is monitored by leaders to ensure that no groups miss out and a good number of students from across all groups attend. The school's leaders take steps to eliminate any discrimination through ensuring equality of access. They are also successfully reducing any gaps in performance between different groups in the school. The arrangements for the safeguarding of students comply with regulations.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

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

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

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

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Cromwell Community College, Chatteris, PE16 6UU

Thank you for helping us when we inspected your school. We spoke with a good number of you and found you to be friendly and helpful.

Your school is good. It does a good job in educating you. You reach standards in the main school that are above average and you make good progress in your work. Standards in the sixth form are average and the progress of sixth form students is satisfactory, but there is evidence that they are improving.

Your school is good because teaching is good, you behave well and your attendance is above average, so you learn well. The Principal and the other leaders check thoroughly how well you are taught and how well you learn. They take the necessary steps to bring about improvements where they are needed. They have been successful in this. To help your school to improve further, inspectors have suggested that your school:

- ensures that during lessons you are asked questions to test your understanding so that any necessary help, or more challenge, can be given to you
- gives you more opportunities to speak at length to explain your understanding of the work
- provides more opportunities for you to work independently or in collaborative groups
- provides you with more opportunities for group discussions to generate ideas for your extended writing.

You can help by continuing to attend well and letting your teachers know if the work is too difficult or too easy.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

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