

The Community College, Bishop's Castle

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123564
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	363966
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick 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	560
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Maclachlan
Headteacher	Alan Doust
Date of previous school inspection	26 May 2010
School address	Brampton Road Bishop's Castle SY9 5AY
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 32 lessons taught by 30 teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students. They observed the college's work and looked at documentation relating to planning, monitoring, safeguarding, communications with parents and carers, and analysed questionnaires from 120 parents and carers, and 108 students.

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

- The impact of any improvements on the outcomes for different groups of students, particularly in terms of progress and behaviour.
- The extent to which more effective teaching and the use of assessment is embedded and what this indicates about the improvements made to management and leadership at every level.
- The college's track record in raising standards and quality, and what this indicates about the college's capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

This college is smaller than the average sized secondary school that serves a relatively lowly populated and largely rural community. A very small minority of students previously attended Welsh primary schools. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. A few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Following a year in which the college had three different headteachers, a permanent appointment has been in place since the beginning of this term. The college has had a specialism in humanities since 2008.

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

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 15 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Students develop well the skills they need to be successful in the future primarily because of strengths in their social skills, their awareness of the world of work that includes impressive insights into sustainable development. The college has used its humanities specialism well to actively involve students in considering environmental issues.

The college has ensured that the large majority of lessons are more effectively planned so that students experience more challenge and have a better understanding of what they are learning. All students now have challenging targets and the college has improved the monitoring of these to evaluate the effectiveness of its provision so that it can better target interventions. Around half the lessons seen were good or better although a few were inadequate. In the more effective teaching seen, teachers' questions and learning activities were matched well to the different abilities in the class. Students were clear about what they must do to reach their targets because this was clarified through regular reviews in lessons and through their involvement in self- and peer-assessment. However, rather too many lessons lacked these qualities and this prevents students from making good progress. In addition, in a minority of lessons there is insufficient focus on literacy and numeracy. Although achievement is improving results have been average over the last three years. Students understandably do not always engage well with activities that are not matched well to their needs and this has limited the improvement the college has been able to make to student behaviour.

Communication with parents has increased but leaders recognise that there is more to do to positively involve parents in improving the quality of learning.

Greater stability in leadership at a senior level has led to improved levels of consistency in the day-to-day running of the college. One older student captured the views of many in stating, 'Things now appear to be better organised.' The senior leadership team has identified the college's strengths and weakness and the evaluation of the sixth form is particularly astute. The college leadership, including the governing body, recognises that there are inconsistencies particularly in terms of the quality of teaching. Although staff are experiencing more effective professional development, some weaker teachers are not receiving sufficient additional support to enable their practice to improve quickly. The college does not always use information about all outcomes to evaluate the impact of provision on different groups of students. Most leaders of departments lead well by example but they are not yet consistently effective in their monitoring roles. Despite these flaws, the generally improving picture points to a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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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?

- Increase the rate of progress students make by:
 - ensuring that students of different abilities in all lessons undertake appropriately challenging activities
 - improving the effectiveness of questioning, for instance by adopting strategies that ensure all students have to think about responses
 - increasing the review of learning in lessons to ensure that students have a greater awareness of how they can attain their targets
 - improving the management of teaching assistants so they are always used effectively
 - ensuring that all subjects effectively promote students' literacy and numeracy skills
 - eradicating inadequate teaching.
- Improve leadership and management in order to establish more consistent effective practice by:
 - improving the college's approach to equal opportunities by focusing more on all the outcomes for different groups
 - ensuring that professional development is better matched to the individual needs of staff
 - involving staff and students in the development of an agreed teaching and learning policy
 - increasing middle leader involvement in monitoring
 - improving opportunities for students to positively contribute their ideas for improving the college.
- Improve the effectiveness of the college's engagement with parents by:
 - increasing the opportunities for parents to contribute to further development in the college
 - ensuring that parents are better able to support their child's learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students start in the college with average attainment and achieve satisfactorily to reach average levels when they leave. Attainment in most subjects is average, although results were above this in geography and French in 2010. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has remained steady but has fallen behind the national results because these have risen over the last three years. There is a similar picture when this indicator is considered without English and mathematics. Inspection evidence and the college's data indicate that there has been a small rise in

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attainment this year. The results in 2010 suggested that lower attaining students made less progress than other groups. A stronger focus on individual achievement has led to changes to the curriculum that have improved the progress these students are making. However, in a minority of subjects limited progress has been made addressing this disparity because the college leadership have not been sufficiently focused on the performance of different groups. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make broadly comparable progress to others. The college is improving its monitoring of these students so that it better placed to evaluate the progress of those with different needs. Inspectors found no significant differences in the progress made by boys and girls in lessons or for the very few students who speak English as an additional language.

Inspectors observed students making good progress in all the subjects that comprise the humanities. This was also the case in physical education. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong and they usually behave well, even where there are shortcomings in teaching. Students are generally thoughtful and have good ideas about how their college can be improved. For instance, some lower college students thought students would feel safer if they had access to a trained counsellor. Discovery days initiated through the specialism have contributed to the development of the skills students need to learn independently. When given the opportunity, students demonstrated that they can work well in teams. For instance, in a Year 9 French lesson students collaborated very well to produce first-class descriptions of a trip to Paris. Above average levels of attendance and punctuality also contribute to the students' good workplace skills. All students learn about different cultures but only a few have the opportunity to interact with those from backgrounds not represented in the local community, for instance through a trip to a mosque in Birmingham or through participation in events involving visiting arts groups.

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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	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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?

Teaching and the use of assessment have improved since the inspection a year ago, although not sufficient to cross an Ofsted grade boundary. Students interviewed spoke positively about the much greater clarity about what they are meant to learn. As one student stated, 'Before the last inspection we often did not know the point of a lesson but now we have our targets and some teachers make it clear what we need to do to achieve them.' In the more effective lessons teachers vary the pace to enhance learning. When a more challenging question is asked, strategies are adopted to ensure all students have to think about a response. Teachers frequently identify activities appropriate to different groups. In a very good Year 8 mathematics lesson, students took responsibility for deciding which questions they tackled, omitting those that were too straightforward. The role of the teacher was crucial in encouraging those students lacking confidence to attempt the more challenging problems. In the better lessons, teachers regularly reviewed learning to clarify precisely what students needed to do to attain their individual targets. Often competition was used well to lift the pace of learning.

Such lessons contrasted with others that were much less effective. At times teachers relied too much on willing volunteers to answer questions. In such situations, concentration levels often deteriorated as students realised little was expected of them. All groups of students tended to undertake the same task with insufficient emphasis given to reflecting on their learning. Too many lesson endings were rushed so students were left unclear

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about their learning and what might be the next step. These also reduced the possibility of awe and wonder and therefore missed opportunities to promote students' spiritual development. Although examples were seen of teaching assistants being used very well, there were also times when they could not support learning because the teacher talked for too long. Marking has improved, although inconsistencies remain which mean that students are not always clear about what they must do to improve.

There are strengths in the curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where students are broadly happy with their option choices. There are good adaptations for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities although the provision for gifted and talented students is at an earlier stage of development. The college is developing the curriculum in Year 9 in order to ensure a smoother transition into examination courses and to better meet the needs of students of different abilities. The humanities specialism has been instrumental in improving learning, particularly through special events and often with an environmental theme in which students work in teams. In a Year 9 science lesson, a particularly effective strategy involved students predicting the likely shape of a graph in advance of their investigation. In other subjects, students' progress was reduced because opportunities were missed to promote their literacy and numeracy skills.

The better use of assessment information is allowing the college to target support more effectively. For instance, Year 11 students are receiving a range of additional support outside lessons to boost their chances of examination success. The college was able to provide examples of how it provides support to overcome the barriers to learning for some individual students. The impact of this aspect of provision is limited because relatively less attention is given to a consideration of outcomes for different groups.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders have done well to ensure improvement during the last 12 months, most of which was without a permanent headteacher. The unrelenting focus on improving teaching and learning inevitably resulted in other issues being a lower priority. The emphasis has been on whole-college development in order to enhance staff awareness of good teaching and learning practice. With more confident staff this strategy has been largely successful. However, weaker members of staff have struggled to implement these new approaches effectively. Some have not had sufficient support, in part because of variability in the effectiveness of middle leadership. Most middle leaders are highly credible teachers but they are not yet taking sufficient responsibility for improving teaching and learning. The governing body is strongly committed to the college and members are increasingly

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demonstrating the ability to challenge and support senior leaders effectively. There is a plan in place to boost the role of the college council members in influencing decision making.

Assessments are more reliable and the monitoring of targets for individual students is becoming embedded, but there is still some way to go in using data effectively to hold staff to account. Leaders at all levels are not yet paying sufficient attention to the outcomes for groups and this reduces the effectiveness of the approach to equal opportunities. There are strengths, for instance the ethos of the college is helping to ensure that students develop positive attitudes to those that are different to themselves. As a result, inspectors found no evidence to suggest the existence of behaviour that might be prejudicial to different groups.

Safeguarding meets all government requirements and college leaders are taking steps to improve how the views of parents and carers and students are taken into account when reviewing safeguarding. The college has undertaken a systematic audit in regard to community cohesion. The response is strong at the college and local levels. It is recognised that there is more to do to promote students' links with the diversity of cultures found in the United Kingdom.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The progress students make rose in 2009 but fell quite sharply in 2010. Despite this variation, over the last three years students' progress has been satisfactory. There are signs of better progress largely because students' targets are receiving more regular attention in many subjects. Members of the sixth form make a positive contribution to college life, with many supporting younger students lower down in the college. Students

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take care to ensure their personal well-being and their attendance and punctuality are good.

Teaching has similar strengths and weaknesses as in the main college. The very small class sizes means teachers are able to better meet the needs of students of different abilities and provide very specific feedback in this context. Although more challenging targets have been adopted there is a wide variation in how these are used. In some subjects there is too little reference to these and this reduces the opportunities students have to take responsibility for their own learning. Students do not always receive sufficiently frequent feedback on how well they are doing. Students reported that they receive effective guidance in relation to applying to higher education. There are inconsistencies in the support provided by form tutors. The size of the sixth form limits the course options that are available but students currently in this phase indicated that this was not a problem. A commendable aspect of the sixth form provision is the existence of courses that are appropriate for lower attaining students.

The leadership of the sixth form has identified the right priorities and there are signs of improvement, particularly related to the more effective use of targets. However, it remains the case that there are inconsistencies, particularly in terms of students' outcomes across the different subjects.

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

Around 22% of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Of these, a large majority agreed with most of the statements. A minority disagreed with the following statements:

- that the college helps them support their children's learning
- that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour
- that the college takes account of their concerns or suggestions and concerns.

Parents' and carers' views were influential in helping inspectors arrive at judgements, including about behaviour. Improving the effectiveness with which the college engages with parents and carers is identified in the report as an aspect for further development.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Community College, Bishop's Castle 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 120 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 560 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	17	76	63	21	18	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	19	16	83	69	14	12	2	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	19	16	82	68	14	12	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	15	83	69	14	12	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	9	8	79	66	18	15	4	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	8	68	57	32	27	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	4	82	68	17	14	0	0
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)	15	13	74	62	15	13	5	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	12	76	63	16	13	5	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	8	74	62	30	25	6	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	7	73	61	25	21	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	7	6	70	58	19	16	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	13	83	69	13	11	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



17 June 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Community College, Bishops Castle, SY9 5AY

I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome at your college. Special thanks go to those of you who met with us. Your comments were thoughtful, incisive and expressed well. Your views strongly influenced the judgements we made. I want to share our findings, including some ideas of how you can help the college to become even better.

A key finding is that your college no longer requires a notice to improve because it now provides a satisfactory standard of education. We think there are strong signs that this will continue in the future. There have been improvements to teaching and the use of assessment. Most of you know your targets and in many lessons you are receiving better guidance on what you need to do to improve. We think you are developing well the skills you need to be successful in the future. This is primarily because of your good social skills and your awareness of the world of work that includes impressive insights into sustainable development.

We have asked the college to improve how effectively it engages with your parents and carers. We have made suggestions about management and leadership that should result in you having a more consistent experience of college, including in the sixth form. In lessons, teachers need to ensure that students of all abilities are undertaking appropriate activities that challenge you all. In addition, we have asked the college to eradicate the inadequate teaching you sometimes experience. You can help by giving your views about how the college can be improved through the college council that is about to be given an enhanced role in the decision-making process. We have also suggested that you should be involved in the development of a new teaching and learning policy. Having listened to your perceptive and sensible views, we know you can make a substantial contribution to further improving your college.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector

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