

College Central

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136169
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	382036
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2011
Reporting inspector	David Marshall

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

Type of college	Pupil referral unit
College category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of students	5–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the college roll	64
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Nathan Caine
Headteacher	Frank Stanford Executive Head Gavin Thomas Head of College
Date of previous college inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. During the inspection 12 lessons and 11 teachers were observed. Discussions were held with staff, members of the governing body, parents and carers and students. Inspectors observed the college's work and looked at documentation including the college's improvement plan, the tracking of students' progress and records of the support provided to them, and minutes of management committee meetings. In addition, questionnaires from four parents and carers, and others from staff and students were analysed.

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

- How effective are the college's assessment and tracking procedures and how well are they used in planning for individual students' needs?
- What is the impact of the school's provision on students' personal development, their safeguarding procedures and students' ability to become independent and take responsibility for themselves and their own work?
- How does the curriculum and additional activities meet individual needs and contribute to overall outcomes for students across the whole college?
- How successful are leaders and managers at all levels in enabling and securing continuity and improvement?

Information about the college

College Central is a new provision, as of September 2010, which provides pupil referral unit (PRU) placements for all permanently excluded students in East Sussex. College Central was formed after the merger of Virtual Colleges East and West, which themselves were formed from existing PRU provisions at Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings. The college itself is broadly made up of four Key Stage 3 groups and eight Key Stage 4 Groups. The Key Stage 3 groups are made up of permanently excluded students, dual registered students at risk of exclusion and special cases referred to the college. Of the eight Key Stage 4 groups, four are located on local authority sites. The remaining four Key Stage 4 groups are based on sites run by commissioned providers. These students spend three days at their main base and two days a week at various locations receiving vocational/creative courses. All Key Stage 4 students are permanently excluded or special referrals. There is also provision for Key Stage 4 learners identified as foundation learners who have individualised timetables where core provision is commissioned from a number of providers. Primary provision takes place within two Flexible Learning Provisions one at each of the partner ESD schools. These provisions are managed by the schools themselves and pupils are nominally on the College Central roll.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. The proportion of students from ethnic groups other than White British is also well below the national average. An above-average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

These are students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is around the national average.

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 college?

2

The college's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

College Central is a good, and rapidly improving, pupil referral service that is becoming increasingly effective in meeting the complex and diverse needs of its students. The college's success in its first year is due to the knowledge, understanding and efficiency of the management, the effective quality of care and support provided and the good relationships with all agencies involved. The executive headteacher, head of college and management committee provide very effective leadership. They know the college's strengths very well and what needs to be refined further. The executive headteacher defined his aim for success as being able to create 'a warm, caring, stable and supportive environment in which staff and students feel safe'. Its track record of selecting staff and monitoring and improving its provision to meet the needs of all students shows that the college has a good capacity to continue improving and realise this aim in full.

On entry to the different centres, the vast majority of students are disaffected with their education, very poor or non-attenders, and are switched off from learning. The college's innovative provision successfully re-engages them with learning and rebuilds their confidence and self-esteem, to the extent that the majority achieve well enough to return to mainstream schools or go on to study meaningful courses. Both the primary provision and that for Key Stage 3 students are successful in reintegrating students into mainstream schools, with whom they have good and developing relationships. The college has created a very detailed and rigorous system so that teachers and leaders are able to track students' progress accurately including those with complex needs. There is good recording, clear target setting and reviews completed in a timely fashion with the involvement of both education and care staff. Targets are set which relate both to the curriculum and to individual needs. These are discussed and reinforced regularly and students themselves are enabled to evaluate their own progress consistently.

The senior leadership team has monitored teaching and learning rigorously, identified areas for improvement, and worked alongside colleagues in a variety of roles. This has brought about sharper planning for the specific needs of groups of students by gender and ability. Through their developing working practices, staff share their belief that each student is unique and a valued individual with the right to respect and a positive self-image. The quality of teaching is good but there are inconsistencies in how well daily assessment is used to ensure that individual needs are consistently met. Under the guidance of leaders the excellent *Classroom Craft* document is now being implemented more carefully but there is still a way to go to

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make sure all students consistently receive the tuition they need. Although very effective teaching and learning using these approaches are evident in some classes, these methods are not yet adopted consistently throughout the many different parts of the college. Occasionally, opportunities for students to practise their developing skills in a relevant context are missed. Although there are examples of very effective teaching at the different centres being observed by other staff there are not enough opportunities for the sharing of good practice.

The staff are skilled at forging positive relationships with the students, and this is reflected in students' good behaviour during lessons and their rediscovered positive attitudes to learning. The students soon become keen to earn the Positive Attitudes to Learning (PA2L) tokens. There are many strengths in the care, guidance and support that learners receive. Despite their previous poor records and the number of difficulties some students have, their attendance overall is now average. The college's rigorous approach to safeguarding ensures that students are safe, and feel safe, at all times. The college's strong support given to learners' families encourages young people to acquire independence.

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Use the college's current monitoring systems to embed the identified good classroom practices and increase the proportion of good teaching by focusing on:
 - further strengthening the use of day-to-day assessment to provide consistently relevant activities
 - extending opportunities for staff to observe the best practice across the different sites in the college.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of students

2

Students' previously disrupted education has an adverse effect on their attainment on entry to the college and they join the different centres with standards that are well below average. Thanks to the immediate and very careful early assessments, students begin to achieve well and go on to sustain their good achievement. College records show that pupils in the primary provision make good progress and often reintegrate into mainstream schools with skills in line with expectations for their age. Observations of lessons during the inspection confirmed that, throughout the different Key Stages 3 and 4 centres, all groups of students make good progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities similarly make good progress. It was impressive to observe in all lessons, thanks to the very effective care systems, good behaviour and the developing skills students acquire in working independently or with their classmates; these positive features of students' attitudes help to create the high quality climate for learning that was evident in all classes.

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Provision is well planned and this leads to good progress. For example, the college’s records show that around 50 Key Stage 4 students involved in the extremely well-planned Personalised Foundation Learning provision made consistently good progress last year in a wide variety of courses, and went on to further courses or apprenticeships on leaving. The students observed in the Headstart2Work construction course were on task and fully occupied in making a large water feature. They were also moving forward to achieving another credit towards their final certificate and diploma. The MPCT (Military Preparation College Training) presents students with situations that really make them think. As they showed during the inspection, they are very keen to be involved and have learned to set themselves, and each other, challenges.

Students talk positively about how well they are doing and clearly appreciate the support they get and enjoy their learning. There is a great deal of enthusiasm for all activities, especially the art and sporting activities in which they are all involved and making good progress. Students are clear about the importance of keeping fit and have a good awareness of healthy foods.

The improved standards being reached by students, combined with their rediscovered appetite for teamwork, and their interest in learning, prepare them well for the next stage in their education.

These are the grades for students’ outcomes

Students’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Students’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of students’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which students feel safe	2
Students’ behaviour	2
The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which students contribute to the college and wider community	2
The extent to which students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Students’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of students’ 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

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How effective is the provision?

Lessons are carefully planned and teachers are skilled in engaging students effectively in learning, despite in many cases students having previously negative attitudes. Assessment systems, which begin in the good primary provision and are maintained well throughout the college, are of a consistent quality, both in their accuracy and regularity, although daily assessment is not reliably used to ensure that individual needs are being fully met.

Good curriculum planning helps students make good progress because it links closely to assessment criteria so it is clear to students what steps they need to take next. Completely individual lesson plans, within the well-planned curriculum, are being adapted after last year to take account of the stages at which individual students made most progress. The use of information and communication technology is especially good, and often provides students with opportunities, at their own level, they particularly enjoy.

In most lessons observed students were being enabled to consolidate and build on their previous learning well. On all occasions, this was being done in an enjoyable, but challenging, atmosphere. The art, music and lessons seen in the commissioned providers in the Respond Academy showed that the multi-disciplinary approach being adopted there helped students appreciate and thrive in their learning. As one student, a former persistent non-attender, said, 'We are cool – we go to school.'

Consistently high expectations of behaviour ensure that students begin to strive to do their very best. In most lessons highly skilled key workers and teaching assistants support learning very well. This was clear in a lesson on percentages with Key Stage 3 students where the teacher had worked hard to find examples that would be meaningful to the students. As a result, the students were engaged in the lesson immediately.

Throughout the college, there are very positive relationships between staff and students, which contribute to the supportive ethos for study. The impact of the college's good quality support, guidance and care is evident in the students' good standards of behavior, positive attitudes to learning and in their good spiritual, moral and social development. The strong links with outside agencies ensure that all students, including the most vulnerable, are supported well. The vast majority of students, by the time they are ready to reintegrate into mainstream schools, are responsible and have developed good skills that will support them well in their new schools.

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

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The extent to which the curriculum meets students’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The executive headteacher’s high quality leadership, drive and ambition, together with a strong partnership with the very effective head of college have enabled the college to make a very significant amount of progress in a short space of time. This dynamism ensures that complacency is not tolerated. Teamwork is very good including leaders at all levels and the different administrative teams. Staff are focused on further improvement and work well together. As one staff member wrote, reflecting the views of almost all, ‘All new initiatives are debated and staff feel that their opinion is noted and valued, students respect and know the expectations that the head had introduced and a whole college ethos is apparent throughout the various sites.’

The college knows itself very well and its evaluation of its work is honest and accurate. The very supportive management committee is fully involved in this process, challenging decisions and requesting explanations where necessary. It holds the college to account in a challenging but supportive manner. Its focus on improvement through the first year of reorganisation has enabled the college to improve in all directions.

Very careful attention is paid by managers at all levels to the understanding and care of the students. Students’ safety and well-being are paramount at all times, ensuring that all parts of the college are supportive places to be. Students are further protected by rigorous staff recruitment and selection procedures, which show a careful vetting and a robust selection process being undertaken. The senior managers, supported well by all staff, are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination for all students across all aspects of the college’s work. Consequently, all students feel valued. The contribution the college makes to community cohesion is good. There are strong links locally, for example, with employers and colleges. The college is in the process of implementing its plans for wider links in order to raise this aspect of community cohesion to the level of the rest of its provision.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the college so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2

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The effectiveness of the college’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the college promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the college promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the college deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The majority of the very small proportion of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires, and those who spoke to the inspection team, are happy with the college and the provision their children are receiving. They consider that the college has a dedicated team of staff and the head of college leads and manages the provision well. They agree that the college has a warm, supportive and friendly atmosphere and that their children make good progress. Inspectors fully endorse these views. The very small number of concerns were followed up during the inspection, as part of the general gathering of evidence, and discussed with the executive headteacher and head of college.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at College Central to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the college.

The inspection team received four completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 students registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys college	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The college keeps my child safe	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The college informs me about my child’s progress	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this college	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The teaching is good at this college	1	25	3	75	0	0	0	0
The college helps me to support my child’s learning	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The college helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The college makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing college, and for children who are finishing college, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	1	25	1	25	1	25	0	0
The college meets my child’s particular needs	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The college deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	75	0	0	1	25	0	0
The college takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	25	1	25	0	0	0	0
The college is led and managed effectively	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this college	2	50	1	25	1	25	0	0

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

Overall effectiveness of colleges

Type of college	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of colleges)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery colleges	43	47	10	0
Primary colleges	6	46	42	6
Secondary colleges	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special colleges	30	48	19	3
Student referral units	14	50	31	5
All colleges	10	44	39	6

New college 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 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained college inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

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 colleges, special colleges and student referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a student in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the college to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the college 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 college.
Learning:	how well students 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 college's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the college. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The college's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of students. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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



3 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of College Central, St Leonards-on-Sea, TN38 9QU

I am writing to thank you all for making us so welcome when we came to the college and visited the different places you learn recently. We did enjoy our visit. The college is good, and we agree with what you told us – it is a really fun place to learn. Here is a list of some of the things that we think are really good.

- The college looks after you very carefully and you are all beginning to achieve well by the time you leave.
- You behave well, get along with each other and feel safe in college.
- You often have very good ideas about how to make things better and you have a good understanding of how to live healthily.
- You settle down well and find most lessons interesting and really enjoy college.
- There are plenty of exciting things for you to do, in college and in the different classrooms and workshops.
- The headteacher and staff manage the college extremely well.

Even in good colleges there are some things that can be made better. We have asked your teachers to make sure that, no matter which class you are in, you are given the best possible opportunities to learn. We also want them to share what works best in the college with each other. You can help by continuing to listen carefully and take note of what the teachers say. Then you will all carry on making good progress in your learning.

Finally, we would like to thank you once again for all your help. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Marshall
Lead inspector

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