

Robert Blake Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123878
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	380755
Inspection dates	28–29 September 2011
Reporting inspector	John Seal 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	687
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Cheetham
Headteacher	Ann Winter
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2008
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 25 lessons which involved seeing 24 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the college's work and looked at data on students' progress, a range of policies and planning documents, minutes of meetings, the college's self-evaluation documents, risk assessments, financial information, and the single, central record of safeguarding checks on staff. The team analysed questionnaires returned by 184 parents and carers, 99 students and 57 staff.

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

- How much progress students are making in all year groups.
- The quality and consistency of teaching and learning in lessons.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and the progress students make over their time in the college.

Information about the college

The college is smaller than average and holds specialist status for science. Most of the students are of White British heritage. A very small proportion of students are from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small percentage of students speak English as an additional language, most of whom speak Polish. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is much higher than average. Many of these have speech, language and communication needs. The college has very recently federated with the local contributory junior school. There is a new college being built adjacent to the current buildings with plans for opening in October 2012. During the inspection, almost all the students in Year 7 were on a residential field visit.

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?

3

The college's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Robert Blake Science College is caring, safe and welcoming. The college is a nurturing, safe haven for students with outstanding engagement with parents and carers. This is a consequence of the passion and commitment of the headteacher and staff. Very many of the students have significant barriers to their learning. Students told inspectors that they are happy, feel extremely safe and are looked after well. Their attendance is above average, an improvement since the last inspection, and behaviour is good. Despite these strengths, for too many students, progress from their generally low starting points is satisfactory and their attainment is low. This is because of a combination of two key aspects. The first is that too many lessons, across all year groups, do not yet focus consistently on ensuring students of differing abilities make the good or better progress of which they are capable. The second is that the progress and attainment of all students, especially those in Key Stage 3, and the quality of teaching and learning have not, until recently, been monitored and evaluated rigorously or systematically enough. Very recently, the college federated with a junior school which contributes a significant proportion of the students. In addition, the new college building is entering its final stages of completion. These events have provided additional challenges for senior leaders and the governing body.

Attainment is below average but an increasing number of students are now beginning to achieve GCSE results which are in line with the national average. This is a consistently improving upward trend.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are many good and a few outstanding lessons especially in mathematics, science and physical education. However, there is also a high proportion that is satisfactory rather than good or better. The best lessons are very well planned, have clear learning objectives and are practical and engaging, and motivate students to learn. In the less effective lessons, assessment strategies are not fully focused on different students' needs. Students are not encouraged to engage with their learning because of overlong instructions and explanations from teachers. As a result, the inconsistencies in the quality of lessons across subjects and year groups hinder many students from making as much progress as they are capable of, leading to lower attainment overall.

The curriculum is improving and has some strengths. It generally matches the needs of most students. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is on offer but the college's analysis of the participation rates is not systematic enough to provide

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information to check that the needs of different groups of students are being met.

The quality of care, guidance and support is a very strong feature of the college. Procedures and systems for safeguarding are good. Most of the students, parents and carers who completed and returned questionnaires are very happy with the college's provision. The college works very well with external agencies.

The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body know what needs to be done to improve the college. There have been some recent developments in sharing best practice but these are not as widespread as they could be. However, the systems for monitoring pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in Key Stage 3, have not been sufficiently robust to rectify problems swiftly enough until now. Recent appointments to senior leader and middle management posts have ensured that the college is beginning to address the issues identified during this inspection. However, it is too soon to see the impact of their actions. Nevertheless, the commitment to improvement at the most senior levels, the steady increases in attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and the positive climate for learning mean that the college has good capacity to improve.

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

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rates of progress made by all students in order to raise attainment further by a more consistent use of assessment data to structure lessons to meet the needs of all students.
- Ensure all teaching matches the quality of the best in the college currently by:
 - sharing best practice
 - using effective assessment strategies in all lessons
 - providing students with timely information to support them with the next steps of their learning
 - further developing students' independent learning skills.
- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, and the governing body, build on recent developments in monitoring and evaluating of all aspects of the college's performance by:
 - analysing data and information systematically and precisely
 - ensuring responses needed to improve progress and teaching are made swiftly.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' attainment at the start of Year 7 is below average. The college's assessment information, lessons observed and students' work seen during the inspection indicate that there are some inconsistencies in progress from one year group to another. This progress begins to become more consistent and secure towards the end of Key Stage 4 leading to a steady increase in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, at grade C or better. Students who are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in line with their peers. There are early signs that progress is now beginning to accelerate.

Students who completed questionnaires for the inspection and who spoke to inspectors clearly enjoy coming to college. The good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students can be seen in the positive relationships that exist and from the replies of students who completed questionnaires. Bullying is rare and any difficulties students experience are dealt with very well by the adults in the college. In lessons, students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. The increasing rates of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4, positive relationships and attitudes to learning, in combination with above average attendance and good punctuality, mean that students are well placed to secure their future economic well-being.

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	4
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the college and wider community	2
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	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?

There is a mixed picture in the quality of teaching. Many lessons are good or outstanding, but these are often in Key Stage 4. The proportion of lessons that are no better than satisfactory in the rest of the college is too high. In the best lessons, teachers plan well for students’ progress, clear learning outcomes are provided so that all the students know what they need to do to make progress, and teachers remind students how they are doing and what is required to achieve more by making effective use of examination grades and National Curriculum levels. In the most effective lessons, students are involved in the assessment of their work and the setting of targets. Work is well marked and identifies next steps in learning, and good use of teaching assistants supports those students who require additional help. Students develop good skills in becoming more responsible for their own learning. In the less effective lessons, planning is not specific enough. Although there are often learning objectives for the whole class, these are not precisely matched to meet the needs of students with different learning needs or abilities. Teachers spend too long talking and do not provide students with opportunities to discuss their work with each other or explain their thinking. This hinders their progress and does not provide them with opportunities to develop their language skills or make better than satisfactory progress.

The curriculum ensures that all students have opportunities for enrichment activities. For example, during the inspection Year 7 students were developing team building skills on a field trip. Enrichment activities support some of the needs of the more-able students, but the curriculum as a whole is not yet sufficiently well developed to support their learning in lessons. The college’s science specialism is beginning to have an impact and has some good features. For example, Year 6 pupils from the local recently federated junior school attend weekly science lessons.

The quality of the care, guidance and support is consistently good. The transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 is managed very well. Year 7 students are given a good start. Older students say they are provided with good advice in order to move on into employment, training or further education. Students whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, and those with complex needs, are monitored well. This aspect of the college’s provision is good rather than outstanding because evaluation of its impact on students’ academic progress, through examining progress data and intervention strategies, is still quite recent.

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	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher’s ambition and passion for ensuring students are happy, safe and well cared for is clear. In addition, the staff share her vision. The climate of the college is such that all leaders, managers and staff foster positive relationships with students. Plans for improvement clearly identify the areas that require further development. Procedures for safeguarding are good. The college has made a good start in developing better teaching and learning. The strategies for ‘language for learning’ and ‘learning to learn’ are now paying off. However, although the college carries out monitoring activities and routine lesson observations, the rigour and precision of the feedback and follow-up for teachers are not consistently sharp enough. As a result there are examples of some teachers being given areas for improvement in their practice but not all of these areas are addressed quickly enough. Individual student tracking procedures are secure. These chart students’ progress and attainment accurately but this information is not analysed at a group or whole college level frequently enough, especially in Key Stage 3. The college has already recognised this and has recently started to improve aspects of its practice. Recent appointments at a senior and middle manager level have resulted in more effective approaches to checking the quality of lessons and how students progress. The governing body is supportive. Governors know what the college needs to do to improve further, but leaders and managers have only just begun to successfully address weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems. Promotion of equality and addressing discrimination are satisfactory rather than good because although the college ethos is tolerant and harmonious, there remain some gaps in the progress made by different groups, although school managers are now beginning to tackle this. The college has secure and appropriate plans in place to support community cohesion. Particularly successful is the engagement with the local community regarding attitudes to the college.

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 college so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the college’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the college promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the college promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the college deploys resources to achieve value for money	3
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Views of parents and carers

Most of the parents and carers who returned the questionnaires were very positive and supportive of the college. The responses were above the current national benchmarks for agreeing with the statements.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Robert Blake Science College 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 184 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 687 pupils registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys college	69	38	103	56	9	5	2	1
The college keeps my child safe	73	40	107	58	2	1	1	1
The college informs me about my child’s progress	77	42	99	54	5	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this college	69	38	102	55	7	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this college	73	40	105	57	3	2	0	0
The college helps me to support my child’s learning	57	31	115	63	9	5	1	1
The college helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	21	128	70	9	5	1	1
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)	77	42	93	51	4	2	2	1
The college meets my child’s particular needs	60	33	114	62	5	3	3	2
The college deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	79	43	87	47	14	8	2	1
The college takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	27	117	64	10	5	1	1
The college is led and managed effectively	85	46	92	50	3	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this college	93	51	82	45	7	4	1	1

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 pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a college. A college that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory college is providing adequately for its pupils.
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 pupils. 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
Pupil 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 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 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 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 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 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 college, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their college.



30 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Robert Blake Science College, Bridgwater TA6 6AW

We enjoyed our visit to your college recently. Many thanks for your friendly welcome. During the inspection, we met with groups of you and read the questionnaires that some of you returned. We observed lessons and looked at your work. Nearly all of you told us that you enjoy college, feel exceptionally safe and are very well looked after. We agree with you, but also found many of you are not always making as much progress as you could. Also, the college's systems for checking how you are taught and how much you are learning are not yet as good as they could be, although these things are beginning to improve. We judged that your college provides you with a satisfactory education.

Some of the good things we found included:

- your behaviour
- your above-average attendance and getting to lessons on time
- the college helping you to lead healthier lifestyles
- the college being exceptionally good at working with your parents and carers.

We have talked to your headteacher, staff and governors. They will be working on:

- making sure more of you achieve better GCSE grades
- increasing the number of good and outstanding lessons by teaching you the skills to become independent learners and giving you better feedback on how to improve
- improving how the college checks the amount you have learned and how good lessons are.

You can all help by making sure you continue to attend well and work as hard as you can. We wish you all the best for the rest of your time at college and your future lives.

Yours sincerely

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector

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