

Earl Mortimer College and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116941
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	379331
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Davinder Dosanjh 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	649
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brigadier Peter Jones
Headteacher	Adrian Long (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
School address	South Street Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8JJ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 33 teachers, visiting 34 lessons. Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, groups of students, representatives of the governing body and staff. They observed the college's work and looked at documentation, including development plans; the analysis and tracking of students' progress; students' work; and a wide range of other policies and college documents. The inspection team received 102 completed questionnaires from parents and carers, and scrutinised questionnaires completed by students and staff.

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

- The achievement of students in mathematics and English.
- The quality of teaching in promoting good learning and progress for all students.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in tackling underperformance and driving sustained improvements across the college.
- The effectiveness of the sixth in ensuring good progress is made by students on AS and A level courses.

Information about the school

Earl Mortimer is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has had specialist status as a sports college since 2003. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds with very small numbers from minority ethnic groups. A small but increasing proportion of students join and leave the college after the start of Year 7. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The college moved into a new building in September 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Earl Mortimer is a satisfactory college which has made some significant improvements over recent years. There are an increasing range of good aspects. The college has been transformed by the impressive new building, changes to the timings of the college day and the new uniform. It has been the start of a new era in the life of the college and the town it serves. The college is a calm and welcoming place where students learn in a supportive and inclusive environment. It is a harmonious community with a strong ethos, which ensures that students work well together and behaviour is good. The quality of students' care, guidance and support is good. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are served well by the close attention the college gives to their needs. The college ensures that helpful and personalised support is available to students. Students feel safe and enjoy college. The well-organised curriculum provides students with a wide range of opportunities to learn effectively. There are many strong partnerships with local schools, other agencies and the local community, all of which enhance the provision, support and opportunities available for students.

There has been a gradual improvement in the percentage of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics. Attainment against this measure is now broadly average and reflects satisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 4. Results in English and mathematics, while improving over time, dipped in 2011. There have been significant staff changes in both subjects which are leading to inconsistencies in how teachers' work. GCSE results are good in science, design technology, sports courses and modern foreign languages. The GCSE results in 2011 showed a continued rising trend in the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent. Attainment against this measure is above the national average. A sharp focus on driving improvement in the core subjects through rigorous tracking and monitoring of students' progress and a range of intervention strategies is starting to have a clear impact. The college leadership team recognises that these strategies have not yet secured good progress for all students. The specialism in sports is contributing to raising standards and is a real strength of the college. It has brought many benefits to students, such as international sports tours, the 'dreams and teams' initiative with India, and numerous national awards. These have helped to secure high levels of student participation in sports studies and extra-curricular activities.

Teaching is satisfactory overall with an increasing proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is improving, and the use of a

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common lesson planning template is contributing to consistency and supporting the college's drive for better rates of progress. Not all teaching meets the varying needs of students sufficiently well because lessons sometimes do not contain the level of challenge needed. In addition, questioning techniques do not always encourage students to think and develop their understanding. Students demonstrate the ability to be independent in their learning but at times teachers talk for too long.

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards have fluctuated and, while students make satisfactory progress overall, there are pockets of underachievement. At AS level, too many students do not pass module examinations. There is a renewed focus on improving student outcomes and provision.

Senior leaders are accurate, honest and critical in their self-evaluation of the college. The success of actions to improve students' outcomes indicates that the college has a good capacity to continue to improve. It has a good track record in improving attendance, and the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. The arrangements for tracking and monitoring of students' performance are rigorous. The principal and senior leadership team provide strong and purposeful leadership with ambitious and well-focused plans for the future. Systems are constantly reviewed to ensure they are robust and effective and, as a result, all aspects of the college run smoothly.

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?

- Continue to raise achievement in English and mathematics through:
 - monitoring and evaluating the intervention strategies used to support students who are underachieving to ensure that they are consistently effective
 - sharing good practice more frequently among the English and mathematic teams to ensure consistency in the ways teachers assess, plan and deliver lessons.

- Ensuring 75% of teaching and learning is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring the level of challenge provided by learning activities is appropriate for the range of abilities in the class
 - reducing teacher talk in lessons with more focus on student activity and learning
 - developing questioning techniques which encourage students to think and develop their understanding.

- Improve achievement in the sixth form by:
 - implementing robust systems to track and monitor students' progress

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- which include accurate teacher assessments
- ensuring students make best use of time outside lessons on high quality independent tasks
- developing the curriculum and partnerships with other providers to better meet the needs and interests of the students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Since the previous inspection, there has been a steady improvement in the standards reached by students by the end of Key Stage 4. Improved use of performance data and the detailed individualised tracking shows that the majority of students are now making the expected levels of progress. The progress of different groups is carefully tracked, with an increasing range of effective intervention strategies to remedy underachievement. As a result, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good individualised support they receive. They benefit from effective academic and pastoral support. Learning support assistants help students competently in lessons. They are most effective when they are well informed by the teacher of the purpose of the learning so that their efforts are well directed to ensuring that students make the progress intended. Students known to be eligible for free school meals also make good progress.

Inspectors' own observations showed progress in lessons to be typically satisfactory and in some lessons good. Students are responsive to their teachers' encouragement, and willing learners when they have the opportunity to engage fully in lessons. Learning is good when there is an element of independence and students have opportunities to work in pairs or groups. In satisfactory lessons, learning tasks do not always meet the needs of students sufficiently well because all groups were learning at the same pace, thus some were not provided with enough challenge.

Students report that bullying is rare and that it is effectively tackled when it becomes known. They behave considerately towards each other during lessons and around the college. Movement between lessons is calm and purposeful; large numbers of pupils congregate in the 'street' area during break and lunchtime in a consistently co-operative and well behaved manner. Exclusion rates have declined considerably as a result of targeted support and intervention, such as the use of key workers and the introduction of an intervention centre. Students have a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, including the requirement for both a balanced diet and regular exercise. Participation in extra-curricular sporting activities is good. The college council makes a positive contribution to the life of the college by enabling students to contribute to the development of the new college building and to the selection of the college uniform. Links with the local community are strong and have developed significantly since the move to the new building. Students are concerned about local issues and have met with the Member of Parliament to contribute both to discussion and consequent action.

Opportunities are taken to develop students' literacy, numeracy and information and

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communication technology skills across the curriculum. Students’ attendance is broadly average and has improved over recent years as the result of a number of targeted and effective strategies, such as the employment of a home/school liaison officer. Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A range of opportunities are offered to students to broaden their horizons, for instance through visits, sporting and cultural events.

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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The majority of lesson plans include clear and appropriate learning objectives, based on the assessment of prior learning, so that learning is consolidated and extended. There is a wide range of activities to engage, motivate and build the independence of students. Staff and students use information and communication technology effectively to support learning across the curriculum. Initial questioning is used well to elicit students’ understanding; however, the effective use of follow up questioning to challenge is less well developed. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and many display a passion for their subject. The pace of lessons varies from good to slow. Where the pace is good, it is due to well-structured lessons, often with well managed and timed sequences, which move learning on to meet objectives. When pace is slow, too long is spent on a single activity. A range of assessment techniques are used to support learning, including effective use of self-assessment. The marking of books is variable, with many giving good guidance to students’ on how to further improve their work and achieve their target. Teaching facilitates good relationships between students, and paired and group work is effective at promoting

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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collaboration.

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 offers a broad range of course options, including a growing number of vocational courses. These effectively meet the needs and aspirations of the students. Strong partnerships exist with other local schools which enable students to access courses that the college would not be able to offer. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of 'drop down' timetable days that provide good opportunities for the students to develop a wide range of cross-curricular skills. The sports specialism is a strength within the curriculum with many students opting for sports qualifications. The college has a wide range of successful sports teams while also providing a wealth of opportunities for less talented performers to participate in sport. The sports status infuses other curricular areas, with a particular focus on leadership and communication, enabling students to become more effective participators and independent learners. Specialist subjects play a key role in the college's primary liaison and links with community sports clubs. As well as sports, there is a wide range of other extra-curricular activities which are popular and contribute much to students' enjoyment of college life.

The college is a caring environment where the specific needs of students are well met. It is able to point out striking examples where well-targeted support has made a difference in improving students' attendance, well-being and achievement. Support for students special educational needs and/or disabilities is well managed.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a great deal of confidence in the ambition of the principal, who has raised staff and students' expectations and driven improvements on a number of fronts. Senior leaders are working effectively in planning and implementing improvements. Commitment is evident at all levels and staff morale is high. Drive and ambition is clearly focused in the college development plans and key challenges set for staff and subjects. Underachievement is being challenged. Detailed monitoring and evaluation of the work in different subjects is leading to searching analysis and identifying further areas for improvement. Middle leaders have a good understanding of data and whole college priorities. The data systems used by the college are very comprehensive and provide robust data by which the college can monitor students' progress against targets. Senior leaders have consistently communicated high expectations about teaching and learning to staff and provide an accurate diagnosis

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of teaching.

There is a clear sense of purpose in striving to improve among both senior and middle leaders, who share this vision with all staff.

The governing body is well informed and discharges its statutory duties appropriately. They have played a key role in the strategic direction of the college through the new building and having a public meeting to set out the college’s vision for working with the wider community. All safeguarding arrangements are met; the college has very clear policies and procedures which rigorously ensure the safety and welfare of students. The college has a generally positive relationship with parents and carers, providing them with frequent information. Engagement with hard to reach families is effective.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are central to the college’s aims. The college undertakes a detailed analysis of the performance of a range of groups and is targeting appropriate action to close gaps in performance. The college has a clear understanding of its local context. The college is, in itself, a cohesive community but has not yet developed a sufficiently rigorous analysis or detailed plan to promote community cohesion, in terms of the broader national context.

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 school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The majority of students make satisfactory progress and demonstrate sensible, mature attitudes to their studies. On vocational courses, students make good progress and achieve well. Students make good use of opportunities to contribute to the college and local community through a variety of roles, such as head boy or head girl, college ambassadors and volunteering to support younger students in lessons.

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Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. Particular strengths in lessons include high quality dialogue facilitated by probing questioning and strongly-developed skills of critical analysis in the good or better lessons. The satisfactory teaching does not motivate and inspire students to achieve well and, as a result, progress is limited in these lessons. Opportunities for independent learning are limited and students do not always make the best use of free time in college.

The college offers a modest range of A level and A level equivalent subjects, including applied vocational courses. Generally, the curriculum meets the needs of students. Positive changes are beginning to emerge. Partnership arrangements are developing to broaden choice and ensure high quality delivery. Students are supported well by their tutors and their teachers. Guidance into the sixth form has in the past been an issue. This resulted in some students being placed on courses that were not suitable for them, coupled with an unacceptable number of students failing to attain a pass grade at AS level. The college has now addressed this with improved initial advice and guidance. Support for students entering higher education is effective. Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. Strategies for improvement are well focused but many are new and have therefore not shown enough impact.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
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

The majority of parents and carers agreed that the college keeps their child safe and they enjoy college. A small minority expressed some concern about behaviour; the inspection team judged behaviour to be good. Although students commented favourably on the improvements since moving to the new building, these improvements are not yet fully reflected in parents’ and carers’ views. The lead inspector had a discussion with the principal about the results of the questionnaires to inform the college’s future work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Earl Mortimer College and Sixth Form Centre 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 102 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 649 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	25	68	67	7	7	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	38	37	62	61	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	27	26	69	68	5	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	32	61	60	5	5	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	27	26	64	63	9	9	1	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	25	25	63	62	11	11	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	13	83	81	5	5	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)	21	21	71	70	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	24	24	67	66	6	6	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	18	57	56	16	16	10	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	15	66	65	9	9	8	8
The school is led and managed effectively	23	23	63	62	14	14	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	29	28	63	62	7	7	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



9 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Earl Mortimer College and Sixth Form Centre, Leominster, HR6 8JJ

Thank you for the warm welcome at you gave me and the other inspectors on our recent visit. We all enjoyed talking with you and you helped us to find out about the college. The college provides you with a satisfactory quality of education overall. However, the Principal and his staff are making some important improvements and some areas are good. The new building is impressive and brings you many benefits; it has been a new era in the life of the college. The following points are the key strengths of the college.

- You feel safe at college and the quality of care, guidance and support you receive is good.
- We liked the calm and orderly atmosphere in the 'street' area and thought your behaviour was good.
- Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well served by the close attention the college gives to their needs.
- The college's sports specialism is a real strength and offers you a wide range of opportunities in leadership, sports tours and clubs which many of you take part in.
- There are many strong partnerships with local schools, other agencies and the local community which support your personal development.
- Senior leaders and managers are successfully bringing about improvements in attendance and GCSE results continue to improve.

We have asked the college to make the following improvements.

- Increase the number of lessons where teaching is good or better.
- Continue to improve performance in English and mathematics.
- Improve achievement in the sixth form.

You too can help the college to improve ensuring you attend college regularly. We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector

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