

Sky College

Pickeridge Close, Taunton, TA2 7HW

Inspection dates 19–20 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Teaching is not good enough to make sure that students make consistently good progress.
- Students are not always skilfully managed, so that, although they feel safe, their behaviour is not as good as it could be.
- Students do not always know what they need to do next in order to make rapid progress.
- Teachers miss opportunities to help students improve their basic skills, particularly in writing.
- Activities are not always set at the right level for the students, because some teachers are not yet making skilful use of the information they have about individuals' progress.
- Subject leaders do not have the opportunity to check up on the quality of teaching in their own subjects, to find out where improvement is required.

The school has the following strengths:

- The new leadership team is committed and industrious and has established a clear vision for the future which all staff share.
- Students are making faster progress this year in reading and mathematics through the good work of the new leadership team. They are gaining an increasing number of qualifications.
- The number of days lost through exclusion has dropped rapidly this year, and attendance is rising fast through the robust action the college has taken.
- The leaders have high expectations of the staff and have got rid of inadequate teaching.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons jointly with the Principal or vice-principal taught by eight members of staff.
- The inspector held meetings with students, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of staff. A telephone call was held with the executive headteacher of the Lilac Sky Company and with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the nine staff questionnaire responses, but there were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be taken into account.
- The inspector observed the work of the college, and examined a number of documents including the college's information about students' progress, teaching observations, self-evaluation, information and records on behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, the college development plan and records of governors' meetings.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sky College provides education for boys who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All of the students have a statement of special educational needs. On average, each student has previously attended four different schools.
- The students come from all parts of Somerset, as this is the only special school of its type in the county.
- More than three-quarters of the students are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked-after children, and students from service families). This proportion is well above average.
- A new Principal has been in post since September 2012, and a new vice-principal has been in post since January 2013.
- The college makes use of alternative provision off site, with students accompanied by members of the college staff. Students attend further education courses at Bridgwater, Cannington and Yeovil Colleges and at Somerset College of Arts and Technology. Students also attend the Alternative Education Centre in Taunton, and the Deane Discovery Centre Forest School.
- The college's accommodation is currently being redeveloped. During this time, the college is not offering students boarding accommodation as it has done previously.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and so that students always make at least good progress by:
 - making sure all students know the next steps they have to take in their learning
 - using information on students' progress in order to match activities more closely to their needs and capabilities
 - taking every opportunity in all subjects to help students improve their writing skills
 - giving more guidance when marking so that students know precisely how to improve their work
 - developing subject leaders' skills and experience in order to improve the quality of teaching.
- Improve the management of students' behaviour so that it is always at least good.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The college's own information shows that, although students' progress has improved rapidly over the past year, low attendance and inconsistencies in teaching have resulted in a lack of good progress over time.
- Almost all the students join the college with fragmented and negative experiences of education, and all have attended a number of different schools, up to nine in some cases, in the past. This has resulted in low attainment which has persisted throughout their stay.
- Almost all students achieve qualifications from the wider range of courses that is now available, and most meet their targets for attainment. Last year, the majority of leavers successfully moved on to further education, training or employment. A much higher proportion is predicted for this coming year, as many leavers have already secured a further education place through the improved partnership arrangements.
- Students arrive with generally weak literacy skills and their self-confidence to improve in this area is often shaky. The college has introduced a good system of one-to-one support and guided reading, so that students are now making faster progress in reading.
- Students make slower progress in writing because teachers do not always build in opportunities to reinforce basic writing skills in all the different subjects.
- Although students' numeracy skills are equally poorly developed on arrival, they make faster progress in mathematics because most teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and teach it enthusiastically.
- The college's information on individual students and lesson observations show that there is little discernible difference in the progress of different groups, including those who learn off site. The exception to this is that progress is faster for those students who have stayed the most time at the college.
- Students for whom the college receives additional pupil premium money make similar progress in English and mathematics to other students in the college. The college offers these students additional one-to-one support for literacy, supported placements off site and increased vocational support.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to see that students make fast progress in all their lessons and subjects.
- Lesson observations during the inspection, the college's records, and discussions with staff and students confirm that the quality of teaching has improved over the past year because of the effective leadership of teaching. There is no longer inadequate teaching.
- An increasing proportion of teachers are very effective in the classroom, and students make good progress in their lessons.
- However, in a number of lessons, teachers do not always use progress information well to match tasks precisely to students' varying needs and capabilities, resulting in tasks that are too easy or too difficult.
- Teachers often miss opportunities, both in lessons and when marking books, to emphasise students' individual targets and set out the next steps the students need to take. As a consequence, students do not always have a clear idea about how to improve quickly.
- Teachers do not take every opportunity to improve students' writing skills in every subject by pointing out errors in spelling and punctuation, and by making suggestions to improve the appearance of their work.
- There are generally good relationships within most lessons, although not all teachers are equally skilled in returning students to learning quickly if they get upset.

- Teachers work cooperatively with support assistants to give one-to-one support, or to teach small groups. This means that students who have difficulty in learning or in maintaining self-control receive the additional attention they require.
- In the more productive lessons, teachers skilfully question students to check whether they have understood what has been taught and they develop new skills and acquire new knowledge. For example in a history lesson, the teacher used questioning well in order to maintain students' attention on the topic of the American West.
- There are good arrangements at the end of each lesson for students to evaluate their own behaviour and learning, and gain rewards through a commercial online system.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Students arrive at the college with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties that have not been resolved in the past. After they have been there a short while, they begin to regain their self-confidence and to rediscover the value of learning. However, because of inconsistent management by staff, students' behaviour is not yet as good as it could be and requires further improvement.
- Not all teachers are equally skilful in defusing potential crises and nipping poor behaviour in the bud. The lack of challenge in some lessons means that students sometimes become restless and lose concentration.
- The new leadership team has quickly recognised the need to make this issue a priority and has introduced a new behaviour policy and procedures that are already showing signs of success. The online reward system is working well, and students are working hard to achieve valued rewards which include the opportunity to donate to a charity of their choice.
- The new policy on exclusion means that the number of days lost is now a third of the level it was for the same period last year.
- A new policy on attendance, including weekly meetings of the student welfare and attendance team, means that students' attendance, although not yet as good as it could be, is up on last year's figures. The attendance of many individual students shows quite dramatic improvement when compared with their attendance at their previous schools. There is assiduous follow-up on unexplained absences and the college has taken court action where this has been deemed necessary.
- Students told the inspector that they feel safe at the college and that staff show they care in a number of ways. Students are aware of safety issues and about the different forms of bullying. They say there is some bullying but this is dealt with well by the Principal.
- Students understand the dangers of smoking although a number of them admitted that they continue to smoke when not attending the college.
- Out of lessons and around the college, students are largely sensible, friendly and calm. They are respectful towards the staff and each other. In the inspector's meeting, the students were quick to reassure each other about their chances of realising their career goals in later life.
- Although there is more to be done, recent improvements in the reward system and attendance, as well as the significant decline in exclusions, reflect the students' increasing enjoyment of learning.

The leadership and management

are good

- The recently appointed Principal and vice-principal have brought a new sense of urgency, passion and commitment to the college's development. Between the last inspection and September 2011, the college had four changes of leadership team and the college's upward trajectory was beginning to stall.
- The new leadership team has brought high expectations of success and a clear vision of the

way forward that is shared by all the staff. This clarity of purpose has already brought about strong improvement in achievement, attendance and behaviour.

- The leaders have an accurate eye for what needs to be done and are realistic about the current quality of education. They understand that there is a lot more to do, but have laid sturdy foundation stones for future success through rigorous monitoring, review and planning.
- Given the improvements already in hand and leaders' accurate view of how well it is doing, the college displays a strong capacity to continue improving.
- The local authority is effectively supporting the college, principally through its partnership arrangement with the Lilac Sky Company, but also through the close working relationship with the local authority attendance officer. The company provides the college with regular external monitoring and carefully planned training. As the college's effectiveness has grown, this support is being proportionately reduced.
- The vice-principal currently checks the quality of teaching through informal and formal lesson observations. Joint observations with the inspector show that the college accurately judges the quality of teaching and learning. The observation arrangements do not currently involve all subject leaders, who would benefit from a greater insight into how teaching in their subject might be improved.
- The college has improved its relationships with parents and carers, particularly through the appointment of a family support worker. The college offers parents and carers who are hard to reach transport to and from important meetings such as annual reviews. Parents and carers receive regular updates on their children's progress through texts, emails, newsletters, phone calls, meetings and home visits.
- The leadership team has improved the way in which staff collect and check information on students' academic progress from their various starting points. This is enabling the college to identify more precisely where additional help and support are required. Not all teachers are skilled in using this information to set work that is at the right level.
- The leadership team has gone to some lengths to set up and maintain constructive partnerships with local schools and external agencies, in order to promote achievement and to smooth the transition for students back to mainstream schools or on to the next stage of their lives.
- The leadership team has widened the choices of qualifications available to the students, offering education off site through alternative providers and by a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy. In order to support students' personal development, the leaders have introduced a tutor system, and are revamping the personal, social and health education programme.
- The college leaders receive weekly feedback from off-site providers about how well the students are performing. If a student fails to attend, there is an immediate report from the accompanying member of staff back to the college. The alternative providers make a significant contribution to the achievement of students, principally by helping the students to develop a structure in their lives and enjoyment of learning through interesting, practical activities, such as log splitting and making toy animals out of wood.
- The college has updated its procedures for managing teachers' performance. Through these arrangements, the Principal makes sure that only teachers meeting the appropriate standard move up the salary scale.
- The Principal and vice-principal have acted decisively to remove all inadequate teaching and staff are made aware that continued poor performance is not acceptable.
- The leaders and the governing body see that safeguarding procedures are fully carried out, including the arrangements for the management of students if they become aggressive or abscond.
- Leaders actively tackle discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for all members of the college community.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Although the governing body has vacancies, it continues to provide support and challenge for the Principal, making sure that there is effective checking of staff performance and the way pay is managed. The governors receive regular, detailed reports from the Principal and are made aware of the strengths and weaknesses of attendance, achievement and the quality of teaching. They keep up to date, through the Principal, on what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. The governors have a broad awareness of what resources the college requires in order to improve. The governors know how the pupil premium money is used to make sure that eligible students attain the same success as others. The governors have received appropriate training on performance management and lesson observations.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123939
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	400121

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paddy West
Principal	Richard Berry
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2011
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