

Ely College

Downham Road, Ely, CB6 2SH

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership is good and improving strongly. Leaders support and challenge staff so results have risen and teaching has continued to improve.
- Achievement is good. Many more students are taking and succeeding at traditional academic subjects. The progress that students make from Year 7 to Year 11 has improved in both English and mathematics.
- Teachers make sure that students know what they have to do to be successful in examinations. They prepare them well to be successful.
- Teaching is good and improving. This has come about from the relentless drive and determination of the Principal. She has developed effective teams at all levels including the governing body.
- Attendance, punctuality and behaviour have strongly improved as a result of a good behaviour policy.
- Students feel safe and make a good contribution to their own safety and that of others.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The marking of students' work is not consistently strong. Sometimes students are not challenged to do their best or told exactly how to improve.
- A minority of teachers are not applying the college's behaviour policy consistently.
- The sixth form requires improvement because, though numbers are small, not all students make good enough progress or attend regularly. The courses offered are not all appropriate and do not all have enough students to give value for money.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons or part lessons, taught by 35 teachers. Five lessons were observed jointly with leaders and managers.
- Inspectors made short visits to Year 11 English and mathematics groups that contained students who were below the national average standard when they entered the college in Year 7. Short visits were also made to lessons to look at the marking in students' books.
- An inspector, led by students, toured the college along with a parent, as part of the college's termly open morning.
- Meetings were held with the principal, college leaders, groups of students, governors and the college adviser.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the college's documents on self-evaluation and safeguarding. In addition, the inspection team examined the college's data on how well students are doing, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents used by the leaders to monitor and evaluate the college's work.
- Inspectors considered the 96 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, two letters from parents and 19 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Anne Pepper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patricia Barford	Additional Inspector
David Butler	Additional Inspector
Miranda Perry	Additional Inspector
Janet Catto	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ely College is a larger than average-sized secondary school, with a small sixth form.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are well below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is below average. This additional funding is given to schools for children in local authority care, children whose parents are in the armed services and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The college uses alternative provision provided by Cambridge Pupil Referral Unit.
- The college has collaborative arrangements to enable Key Stage 4 students to take some specialist work-related courses with other schools. The college has access to specialist provision for hair and beauty and catering courses provided at the East Cambs Skills Centre, which is located on site.
- Ely College converted to become an academy on 1 January 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- A new science block is currently being built.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of written feedback to students so that all students in all subjects experience the high-quality marking that already exist in some parts of the college.
- Make sure that all teachers apply the college's behaviour policy consistently.
- Improve achievement in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that all students attend regularly
 - developing the curriculum to include a wider variety of courses
 - ensuring courses that run have sufficient appropriately qualified students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start at the college with attainment below average. The percentage of students in Year 11 gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE improved considerably in 2012 and was average. Current Year 11 students have made rapid progress and are reaching above average levels. There is no difference in the achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Students are entered early for English language and do well. Most students then take English Literature in the summer of Year 11. A few students are entered early for GCSE mathematics. They are not disadvantaged by this and go on to enter for an AS qualification in mathematics in Year 11. Students in Key Stage 4 who take work-related courses make good progress.
- Literacy has been strengthened and reading is promoted well. A strong feature of lessons is the development of students' communication skills through use of subject-specific vocabulary. Opportunities to develop spelling and grammar in writing are sometimes missed when students' work is not marked consistently.
- Groups of students who entered the college below average in Year 7, disabled students and those with special educational needs, did not make good progress in all subjects by the end of Year 11 in 2012. Current students are doing better. Lower attaining students in Year 7 are given a suitable 'catch up' programme and disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported well.
- The gap in attainment between students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students in the college, was about one and a third grades in English in 2012 and one and three-quarter grades in mathematics. However, the percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals who made the progress expected was better than the national figures in English, and close to them in mathematics. There were no Year 11 students in local authority care in 2012, nor any students with parents in the armed forces. Current students eligible for the funding are making good progress.
- Current students in the college make good progress as a result of the good teaching they receive. For example, in Year 10, students in a mathematics lesson made rapid progress in their understanding of calculating the volumes and surface areas of prisms. This was because the teacher ensured that the students focused on the key ideas through working the problem backwards and devising their own ways of recording the various steps in the calculations to make sure that they had covered all of the possible combinations.
- The sixth form is small compared to the size of the rest of the school, but progress in the sixth form requires improvement, based on 2012 results. Some students are taking courses that are too hard for them and are not attending well because they did not have options that better met their needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and improving. The Principal ensures a relentless focus on improving its quality. As one middle leader said, 'We are challenged to improve our teaching and be inspirational.' Teachers develop their own practice through working with outstanding teachers in the college.

- Students are active in lessons they work well together in groups and respond to questions that make them think. Students help each other and take the initiative. For example, in a science lesson, students organised themselves, devised their own questions and questioned their peers.
- A strong feature of teaching is that teachers are clear about what students are expected to learn in lessons and the usually good feedback means they know how well they are doing. Verbal feedback to students in lessons is strength. Students know their current level or grade and their target. In some subjects, they do not always know how to improve because written feedback to students through marking by teachers is not consistent.
- Students are great partners with their teachers in learning when they are given all the information they need. Students were particularly positive about the consistent support they receive for their written work in science. Teachers pay close attention to exam requirements, particularly with more difficult scientific language and how to structure answers to longer questions which have more marks. As a result, students make rapid improvements.
- Students are being guided very well in their lessons about how to work independently. Inspectors observed a number of controlled assessments, where students were very confidently completing work under examination conditions. In an art lesson, the teacher set high expectations for personal organisation and response, obtaining high-quality work from students who were engaged, motivated and confident.
- A strong example of marking was observed in a Year 8 geography group for lower attaining students; marking was regular with very specific feedback on the level of the work that had been achieved. In contrast, in a mathematics class, books were not marked and students' work was untidy and unfinished. Students told inspectors that they are disappointed when their books are not marked regularly.
- Teaching in individual lessons in the sixth form is good but progress is limited by students' attendance and by courses that do not meet all students' needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students say how well everyone gets on. Groups mix well and students help one another, taking the initiative when they see someone who may need help.
 - Students feel safe. They take a mature approach to some difficult situations such as the stairs in one block. Students are able to consider other people's points of view and gave ideas for improving this situation until the new building work is complete.
 - Students are polite and welcoming to visitors as was shown on the college open morning. Students have positive attitudes to learning in almost all lessons. Occasionally, in a few lessons where teaching is less strong, there are some lapses in behaviour.
 - Discussions with students and staff show that attendance, punctuality and behaviour has improved as a result of a clear behaviour policy. Students understand how to prevent bullying, and know about the different forms it may take. They say it is not an issue in the college.
 - The college investigated why students with special educational needs were appearing in records for behaviour more often than other groups. They improved their support for this group of
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students and current records show this has worked.

- Attendance in Key Stages 3 and 4 has improved and is average.
- When students are placed in alternative provision this is effective in improving their attitudes, attendance and progress. The college can point to striking examples of students from the local alternative provision, which closed, who were reintegrated into the college and who went on to achieve well above what was expected. As a result, only one student is currently learning at a place away from school.
- College records indicate that exclusion rates have fallen over the last two years. Students understand the need for the behaviour policy and some older students commented positively on the strong difference that it has made. They said, 'Teachers can teach now in lessons.' However, feedback from students, staff and parents, indicated that the policy is not consistently applied by all teachers.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, particularly the Principal, have maintained a single-minded and rigorous drive on improving teaching. There is now a strong team of leaders at senior and middle leader levels so actions taken are more consistent. The impact of stronger leadership across the college is now showing in improvements to teaching, attendance, behaviour and the curriculum at Key Stage 4.
- The majority of staff share the Principal's drive. However, a few staff, parents and older students have reservations, particularly about the behaviour policy. A key strength of the senior leaders is their honest and frank approach. The inspection team found that the college is working with staff, students and parents to make adjustments to give the best results for the students.
- The curriculum (courses and subjects taught) at Key Stages 3 and 4 are relevant for all students, with a strong mix of both academic and vocational courses. In the last two years, the numbers of students taking traditional subjects such as science, French, English literature, history and geography has risen as a result of better options and guidance for students in making these choices.
- The curriculum in the sixth form is not suitable. Some A-level subjects have low numbers; this means they are expensive for the college to run and do not give value for money. Too many students are not suitably qualified for the courses they take. The college is aware of this and has suitable changes planned.
- The pupil premium funds have been used for a wide variety of activities to benefit students' development, both academic and personal. They have included additional classes to boost results and the production of revision guides. As part of its effective approach to ensuring equal opportunities, the college is now monitoring the impact of actions more closely and can show that current eligible students are closing the gap on others.
- The colleges trust adviser has provided training for governors, support for self-evaluation and feedback to the college on the behaviour of students with special educational needs and the role of middle leaders. The college makes use of links with other schools and specialist advice for leaders including the bursar.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is effective. Governors make well-focused visits to the college to gain a clear view of how well it is doing. For example, a recent governor visit to the languages department focused on actions taken to improve and the next steps needed. As a result, governors know the overall quality of teaching and the outcomes of plans to support some staff. They understand the importance of performance management and check decisions on pay progression. Governors have capitalised on the change of status. They manage finances well, as shown by the careful analysis that led to current building work. They understand data on the college's performance and use it to compare it to others nationally.
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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	137779
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	406683

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1295
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Harrison
Headteacher	Catherine Jenkinson-Dix
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01353 667763
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