

# Ringmer Community College

Lewes Road, Ringmer, Lewes, BN8 5RB

## Inspection dates

1–2 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- In the last two years, students did not make enough progress, and attained too few high GCSE grades in English and mathematics.
- In several subjects students do not achieve as well as they should, particularly the most able.
- There is too little outstanding teaching and learning for students, including sixth formers. This means they have not made the rapid progress necessary to overcome past underachievement.
- The sixth form requires improvement because progress is not strong enough in several subjects.
- Attendance is below average and too many students are persistently absent. A very small minority of students do not behave well and interrupt the flow of a few lessons.
- Students work is not graded regularly to identify underachievement early. On occasions, students find the work they are given too easy or too difficult. Not all guidance given to help students improve their work is effective.
- The governors, principal and senior leaders did not tackle underachievement, such as in students' reading and writing, rigorously enough in the college's first two years as an academy.

### The school has the following strengths:

- Senior leaders know exactly what needs to be improved and the changes already in place confirm the college's secure capacity to improve.
- Students feel safe, get on very well together and appreciate the outstanding care for their well-being. They acquire leadership skills and undertake voluntary work in numerous ways.
- The college contributes enormously to the local and wider community.
- The college has a wealth of energy-saving features. Its outstanding sustainability work is recognised nationally. Well over 200 students are involved; older students run courses for schools and organisations about their work.
- Actions to improve students' reading and writing are beginning to make a difference.
- Students benefit from the rapidly increasing number of stimulating enrichment activities.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 50 part-lessons, several of which were jointly observed with senior or middle leaders. Inspectors observed an assembly and several tutor sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with many groups of students, members of the senior leadership team, leaders in charge of subjects and other aspects of the college's work, other staff with positions of responsibility and five members of the governing body.
- Inspectors discussed lessons they had seen with teaching staff and examined a range of documents including the college's own evaluation, its raising achievement plan and detailed data about progress, standards, exclusions, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work in lessons.
- Inspectors took into account 76 parents' and carers' responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire, several emails written by parents and carers, and questionnaires completed by 20 members of staff.

## Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Keith Homewood	Additional Inspector
Cliff Mainey	Additional Inspector
David Smith	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Ringmer Community College converted to an academy school on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, with the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- The college is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and the sixth form is much smaller than the average-sized sixth form.
- Most students are White British.
- A very small proportion of students speak English as an additional language or are at an early stage of learning English.
- A much higher than average proportion of students enter the school after the beginning of Year 7 (particularly in Year 10) or leave before the end of Year 11.
- A slightly below average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which in this college provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and a very small number of looked after children.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well above the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well above the national average. The most common needs relate to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, speech and language development, the autistic spectrum or physical disabilities.
- The college has specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs in the form of a unit called the Circle Project for 15 students with Downs syndrome.
- About 20 students are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The college uses alternative, off-site education provision for land-based courses at Plumpton Agricultural College near Ditchling.
- Particularly for its sustainability work, the college has received several awards. These include International Eco Status and International Schools and Ashden awards. Ashden is a registered charity 'uncovering ground-breaking sustainable energy and inspiring others to follow'.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress, especially in English and mathematics, by making sure that:
  - students' work is assessed regularly to identify and tackle underachievement early
  - teachers prepare work for students that stretches them but is not too difficult or too easy
  - students, particularly the most able, focus on attaining a greater number of high GCSE, AS- and A-level grades
  - all teachers give students better quality guidance about how they can improve their work and check that they have time to act upon the comments they receive.
- Intensify actions taken to improve attendance, to reduce exclusions and to deal with the very small number of students who do not behave as well as the majority.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - senior and middle leaders taking immediate action based on the information they receive

about students' progress

- regularly checking the quality of provision in the sixth form to ensure its popularity increases
  - ensuring that all teachers develop students' literacy skills through checking spellings thoroughly and giving guidance on how to interpret and answer examinations questions.
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## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- In 2012 and 2013 students, particularly the most able and girls, did not make the progress as they should have done in GCSE English and mathematics. In both years the percentage of students attaining A\* and A grades was below average in English and well below in mathematics. Students in Years 7 to 9 did not make enough progress in preparation for Key Stage 4.
- Entering Year 11 students early for GCSE mathematics was not successful. Most students who attained grade C were not keen to keep working at the subject; very few of them got a higher grade when they retook the examination about six months later. As a result, the college has discontinued this practice.
- Students supported by the pupil premium attained about one GCSE grade in English and mathematics in 2013 lower than other students. The majority of them made similar progress to other students but several of them had significant learning difficulties or poor attendance, sometimes related to long-term health issues. The previous year's gaps in achievement were small.
- The percentage of students attaining five GCSE A\* to -C grades including English and mathematics was just below the national average in 2013. Based on their starting points, several students did not achieve as well as they should.
- More students were entered for the three separate science GCSEs in 2013. Their results were well below national ones but their progress was better than in 2012.
- In contrast to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, consistently good teaching generated some very good 2013 results with high percentages of top grades in graphics, resistant materials, drama, English literature, French and history.
- Quite a few students enter the college with low reading and spelling ages. These basic skills have not had a high enough profile until this year. With the introduction of a well-organised literacy programme, all students are getting intensive support. Senior leaders monitor reading and spelling ages regularly and good progress is evident, particularly for students receiving the extra (Year 7 catch-up or pupil premium) funding.
- Very few sixth form students have taken academic qualifications in the last two years. Standards are below average with a low percentage of high grades but progress moved closer to that expected in 2013. Progress in work-related qualifications is stronger.
- Students in the Circle Project achieve well in developing skills to cope with life beyond college. Some other students with special educational needs also also achieve well. In 2013, having gained confidence, eight sixth form students with statements of special educational needs proceeded to further education.
- With improved teaching in English and mathematics, students are making faster progress this year but it will take a while for this to be seen in improved GCSE results.
- The very few students who attend Plumpton College one day a week do well. Senior leaders have well-established ties with the college and receive regular feedback about their attendance, behaviour and understanding of safety procedures.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, cannot always show their understanding and knowledge effectively. Teaching is not consistently good at helping students achieve well in examinations.
- In some subjects and lessons, the most able students' learning slows because they finish the work before others and sit waiting to move on. At the same time, a few lower-attaining students and those disabled or with special educational needs struggle to keep up if they

cannot tackle the work confidently on their own.

- The college's policy on how often students' work should be graded is not yet applied consistently. This means that the impetus for improvements is occasionally missed because weaknesses in students' progress are not identified early. A few teachers do not delve deep enough when reading students' work to identify particular things students have not really understood.
- There are subjects, especially practical ones such as science and food studies, where students work well in class, but occasionally their written work is incomplete and homework is not set or marked.
- Most students are conscientious about writing out their spelling corrections, but teachers do not always check that they do them accurately, so mistakes happen again. The emphasis on better reading and writing is stronger this year and most teachers make sure students learn essential subject-specific words; they are not so good at checking that students understand more general words.
- Students in the Circle Project are taught well. They, and some other students with statements of special educational needs, are supported by learning assistants who know them well and achieve the right balance between encouraging them, stepping back to let them get on by themselves and challenging them to do even better.
- Larger Year 12 groups this year are generating better learning. In psychology, students prepare presentations in groups, and in history they debate interpretations and share out research topics.
- The college is keen to get students to work confidently on their own. Year 12 students described how they often prepare codes before computing lessons because they see how it helps them learn well. In a Year 7 history lesson, the teacher assumed students would only use the sentence starters provided if they felt they needed them; students find this a helpful way for them to consider what they can or cannot do.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### require improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because below average attendance, particularly by the ones who are absent the most, is a key factor contributing to their slow progress. Long-term illness and mental health issues are involved but even so, too many students, particularly those with special educational needs and some sixth formers, do not appreciate how much absence breaks up their learning.
- Students who transfer from other schools, particularly those arriving in Year 10, rarely have good attendance records. The college's determined approach to tackling absence this year means attendance is rising; it is working hard to reduce the number of students going on holiday during term time.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions remains relatively higher for students eligible for free school meals and some disabled students and those with special educational needs. However, significant reductions from high figures in the past mean that no group exceeds any corresponding national figures.
- The large majority of students, particularly sixth formers, are considerate, behave well around the college and are attentive and work well in lessons. In each year, just a small number of immature students interrupt learning and are not respectful to teachers. Sometimes they find the work too hard or too easy so they switch off and do not wish to answer questions.
- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is good and one of its major strengths. Assemblies, tutor times and posters, for example, alert students to the pitfalls of social media sites. Students know that discrimination is not tolerated and realise that their White British, rural community does not reflect that seen in other parts of the United Kingdom. They learn about homophobia and most of them are tolerant of different lifestyles.
- With small mixed-age tutor groups, which students like, everyone gets on well together,

generating a secure and cheerful atmosphere. All staff foster good relationships throughout the college. Many students are confident that bullying is very rare and those disabled or with special educational needs say they are never picked on. Students describe how older, trained mentors are often the first port of call for younger ones with concerns. This excellent strategy is one of many ways that students develop social and leadership skills.

- The organiser of OSC@R (Organisations, Societies and Clubs at Ringmer) generates a wealth of enrichment activities which are imaginative, stimulating and give students, and sometimes members of the local community, wonderful and varied opportunities beyond their lessons. Many activities involve students in volunteering and fund raising. Vulnerable students are particularly encouraged to participate.

## The leadership and management

## require improvement

- Despite senior leaders instigating the right actions to generate students' better progress since acquiring academy status, leadership requires improvement because all students do not achieve at least the GCSE and sixth form results predicted by their starting points. The low reading and spelling ages, and weak writing, that hold back some students' learning, were not tackled firmly before the current year.
- In the past, the sixth form has struggled to attract students and to secure a curriculum that has the right balance of work-related and academic subjects. The sixth form leader is realistic about the challenges ahead and there is already evidence of improvement. The sixth form accepts students regardless of their GCSE results. It builds up their confidence and helps them to achieve useful, practical qualifications.
- The checking of the progress made by students in the Circle Project or those disabled or with special educational needs has lacked precision. Recent changes to the leadership and management of these students are already making a big difference but, for example, observations of how they cope and progress in main college lessons have only just started.
- Middle leaders, especially of English, mathematics and science, have now confronted the need to focus on high grades just as much as pass grades. They have welcomed new appointments to their teams in the last few months. Recently appointed middle leaders have improved GCSE results in their subjects and introduced courses that match students' interests and aptitudes.
- As well as introducing an effective literacy programme, the recently appointed coordinator has written an imaginative and practical booklet for primary schools to strengthen their pupils' basic skills. Such liaison with other schools is a strength of the college's community work.
- Senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching accurately and academy status has helped the college to address weak teaching. Leaders now collect a wealth of data about progress but their response to signs of underachievement is not always rapid enough.
- Leaders have evaluated the impact of how extra funding was spent last year and made sensible adjustments. Examples include targeting gifted and talented work for the most able students eligible for free school meals and appointing a dyslexia specialist.
- The Principal is skilful at establishing partnerships with primary, secondary and independent schools, educational organisations and the community; these generate mutual benefits for all concerned.
- Staff have accepted annual reviews being linked to salary progression. Teachers are encouraged to evaluate themselves against the national Teachers' Standards, which the Principal applies robustly. Teachers' training is flexible and well-balanced between whole-college and individual needs and is generating steps forward in students' achievement.
- All students and their families receive high-quality personal support and care for their well-being. The pastoral team works tirelessly to meet the 'whole child's needs' and ensure all have equal opportunities. The college's good promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development also prepares students well for their future lives.

- The college could not do more to keep in touch with parents and carers and inform them about their child's progress; attendance at parents' evenings is high. Almost nine out of 10 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire would recommend the school to others but less than half of them are totally convinced that teaching is good. Most parents and carers of disabled students and those with special educational needs praise the college's work. One parent or carer said, 'The support and encouragement is second to none.'
- Careers guidance, starting well before GCSE options, is detailed and realistic. A higher than average percentage of students stay on between Years 12 to 13. Almost half the sixth form leavers move into employment with most of the others proceeding into further or higher education.
- The local authority has provided minor support for the college since it acquired academy status.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Since becoming an academy, the governors have received training, reorganised the committees and appointed new members with expertise in useful areas. Examining data realistically, they are fully aware of how well students do compared to national figures, realising, for example, that early entry to mathematics has not been a good strategy.
  - Governors know where teaching is not strong, support the Principal's actions to improve it and fully endorse the performance management arrangements. The college's long-term plans reflect governors' understanding of when achievement is predicted to be good. Governors share the Principal's passion to raise students' life chances.
  - Governors make sure that safeguarding and child protection policies are implemented meticulously; an assistant principal is a qualified trainer in these important areas.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137232
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	441126

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	712
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	64
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dexter Allen
<b>Principal</b>	Kathryn Stonier
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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