

# Witchford Village College

Manor Road, Witchford, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 2JA

## Inspection dates

12–13 October 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Since his appointment the principal has driven improvement with determination and clarity of vision. As a result the college's local reputation has improved and, in turn, the number of pupils has increased.
- Leaders' mantra of 'no child left behind' has borne fruit this summer with the progress from their starting points made by disadvantaged pupils being similar to that of other pupils in the college and ahead of that found nationally.
- The college prepares pupils well for their next steps in education or training. It works hard to ensure that pupils have suitable choices for post-16 education.
- Leaders have successfully driven improvement over the last two years. This is apparent across all aspects of the college, but some subjects and other areas of provision have been even more successful than others.
- Changes to the behaviour policy have led to much better behaviour. The on-site alternative provision centre is effective at keeping pupils in the college and ensuring that they are making progress, while at the same time managing any challenging behaviour.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved through a very good focus on professional development, which is highly valued by staff.
- Pupils make good progress. This results from effective planning, strong teacher knowledge of the subject material and how best to teach it, good behaviour, and effective working relationships.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve attendance. As a result it has improved, but not all groups of pupils attend regularly enough to benefit from the college's good provision.

## **Full report**

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

- Further strengthen leadership to bring about even more consistency in the impact of leaders' work.
- Improve attendance further to eradicate the remaining differences in attendance between different groups of pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders and managers have been instrumental in forging the improvements that have taken place over the last two years. The principal has demonstrated a single-minded determination that all pupils should fulfil their potential and make good progress throughout their time at the college. The reputation of the college locally has improved, leading to an increasing number of pupils, especially in Year 7.
- Pupils, parents and staff reported that leaders have taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has been achieved through changing the culture around support and challenge. Senior leaders have coached middle leaders in managing the performance of their staff through using a range of evidence including lesson observation, work scrutiny and the monitoring of information about pupils' progress. Where necessary, leaders have been robust in dealing with underperformance and there have been staff changes as a result. Performance management arrangements are used effectively.
- For the most part, improved teaching and learning is due to high-quality professional development helping existing teachers to improve their practice. Staff regularly volunteer to attend training sessions before the start of the college day. One of these sessions was visited by an inspector, who was impressed by both the turnout and the quality of the training being delivered. In the Ofsted staff survey, staff were very positive about their professional development.
- Until recently, the leadership of teaching and learning has relied on the principal and vice-principal (curriculum) who make a very effective team, but they are thinly stretched. As a result of their training and coaching, middle leaders are now better equipped to drive improvement further. There have been two secondments from among the middle leaders to support the senior team, one of whom is taking on responsibility for leading teaching and learning. The impact of middle leaders' actions to secure improvement is clearer in some areas, such as modern languages and English, than it is in a few other areas.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to improve the progress and raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Pupils are supported well, although sometimes it is hard to find out how the additional funding has had a direct impact on these pupils. Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy is used highly effectively. The college's monitoring information shows pupils entitled to this funding making rapid gains in their progress through Year 7 and catching up with other pupils.
- One of the reasons for improved provision, especially in mathematics, is the school's increasing ability to recruit and retain specialist teachers. The school now has stable staffing in mathematics, and this is having a positive impact on outcomes. Some parents raised concerns about the use of temporary staff as the college has responded to a very small number of staff leaving without notice.
- The college's self-evaluation is accurate, demonstrating that leaders know their institution well. They have correctly identified strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, their energies have been targeted correctly and effectively.
- The curriculum is well thought out. The subjects on offer at key stage 4 change annually to meet the changing abilities, needs and interests of each year group. Where

necessary, links are made with other colleges to enable pupils to access vocational courses such as hair and beauty, but there is no off-site provision this year.

- The college effectively promotes the values of democracy, the rule of law, and tolerance and respect for others. It does a lot to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. The very successful religion and ethics course is central to this and the college recognises the need to maintain this strength during any changes in staffing. In addition, a wide range of subjects help to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For example, the music department works with local primary schools to promote classical music through an orchestra.
- Pupils' social skills are developed in class and in the extra-curricular programme, where for example, pupils are encouraged to undertake leadership roles in the college as well as organising charity fund-raising. Pupils participate in artistic and cultural events which respect and celebrate cultural diversity. For example, the college works with the nearby Ely Cathedral in raising awareness and understanding of the range of faiths found in modern Britain.
- There is a good range of cross-curricular activities in place including music and sport. The college funds additional buses to enable pupils from outlying locations to participate. A good range of visits, for example the geography trip to Iceland, enhance the curriculum and enlarge pupils' understanding of the world beyond the fens.
- Leaders have been keen to act on the advice and support provided externally. For example, since the previous inspection there have been two monitoring visits by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. On each occasion the college was found to have made progress in the areas for further development outlined in the report following Ofsted's previous visit. In March this year, the college participated in a peer review exercise with leaders of other local schools and colleges. The reviewers left the college with some areas for development to which the college has responded, for example by adopting more ambitious academic targets for pupils. The science department has relished the opportunity to learn from another village college in the area.
- Morale is high. All but one member of staff responding to the Ofsted survey said that they enjoyed working at this college.
- The great majority of parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very supportive of the college and their child's experience. A typical comment was: 'The staff are brilliant and there is a lovely family feel about the school. We are delighted with the school.' Over the last two years, leaders have successfully retained that 'lovely family feel' while raising standards.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors have successfully steered the college on a journey that has led to its current improvement.
- Governors take their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and securing the finances of the college very seriously.
- Governors question recommendations regarding pay progression for staff based on their performance management and ask searching questions about why some staff choose not to progress.
- Governors recognise the opportunities offered by the current arrangements in place to join a multi-academy trust in providing reinforcement to both the governing body and the college's leadership.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All statutory requirements regarding recruitment are met. For example, all interviews involve a person who has successfully completed safer recruitment training.
- All staff receive child protection training on an annual basis. Staff are well trained in understanding safeguarding issues including the government's anti-radicalisation programme 'Prevent', and the potential for harm through the use of communications technology.
- A review of actual cases demonstrates that there are effective links with external agencies, and staff take swift action to secure pupils' welfare when needed. The caring ethos of the college ensures that pupils' safety and welfare is given the utmost priority.
- Staff are particularly vigilant regarding vulnerable pupils.
- The curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. Pupils told inspectors that they felt safe, that bullying was rare and when it did occur it was dealt with effectively. Most parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed, although a small minority disagreed that school dealt well with bullying. The overwhelming majority of parents reported that their child is happy at the college.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- In the vast majority of lessons, pupils focus well because teachers plan interesting and purposeful learning activities.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to explain work clearly, especially topics that pupils often find difficult. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the teacher used a numerical example alongside an algebraic addition question to develop pupils' understanding and reasoning skills effectively.
- Pupils display resilience when tackling problems. They find the work hard, but are able to work through their problems because teachers have given them the skills and strategies to overcome the difficulties they face.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved across a range of subjects. For example, teaching is now more effective in modern languages where pupils develop their understanding and skills well. This is because teachers have ensured that the basic vocabulary that is needed to support effective learning is secure.
- In the lessons where learning is most effective, pupils achieve well because teachers continually assess their understanding and adapt activities to clear up any misconceptions.
- Pupils make rapid progress and significant gains in both their knowledge and skills in the lessons where teachers adapt the learning to meet the needs of different pupils. For example, pupils in a physical education lesson were practising set plays in American football because this is where their interests lay.
- Teachers use assessment effectively; they set homework that challenges pupils and provide feedback that helps them to achieve at a higher level.
- Learning is most effective in the lessons where teachers challenge pupils to think logically and explain their answers. For example, in a science lesson looking at the properties of gases, liquids and solids, the teacher used questioning skilfully so that pupils could establish whether a sponge was a solid or not.

- Pupils are helped to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Good examples were seen in lessons in mathematics, languages and science.
- Pupils of different abilities read fluently; they understood the texts and used intonation and punctuation appropriately. Inspectors listened to both the most and least able readers, and found that pupils had effective strategies to both sound out and work out the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- In the very best lessons, teachers have extremely high expectations, and consequently pupils make rapid gains in their progress. The well-practised routines and whole-class participation observed in a French lesson meant that teaching time was maximised to ensure every pupil made strong progress.
- Teachers provide, and pupils make the most of, extra opportunities to reinforce learning. The after-school homework club is valued by pupils due to the additional resources and support available.
- Teachers are keen to reflect on their own practice. For example, seven members of staff attended an optional breakfast training session to develop their knowledge and understanding of an electronic lesson-planning programme.
- Half-termly assessments provide pupils, staff and parents with a clear picture of the progress being made. Teachers analyse the data to identify common misconceptions or weaknesses, and adapt lessons or provide additional support for pupils who need to catch up.
- Overall, inspectors' analysis of pupils' written work over time demonstrated clear evidence of good progress by pupils.

In a few lessons, teaching is not so effective because teachers have not planned well enough to keep the attention of all abilities. In these cases, pupils lose focus and concentration because the level of the work is either not demanding enough or is too difficult. A minority of parents commented on this and a few parents were critical of a lack of homework in key stage 3.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The college's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The college's culture is very strongly focused on care for the whole person. Several parents made comments along the lines that the 'school's pastoral care is excellent'. Central to this is pupils' academic progress. Staff work hard to remove barriers to this progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are punctual and are well equipped for lessons. They get on well with each other and with their teachers.
- Pupils are confident, polite and articulate. They are smart and wear their uniform with pride.
- Personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) education is delivered through a well-thought-out combination of special days involving external experts, form tutor time and subject lessons. The college is committed to raising aspirations and creating opportunities for all its pupils, and leaders spoke passionately about the opportunities to open the doors to a different life for pupils.

- This careers support and guidance begins in Year 7 and continues through the college aided by external, independent careers professionals. For example, while all Year 11 pupils have a careers interview, a female pupil who was planning an engineering apprenticeship expressed doubts and so a second interview was arranged. As is expected, when pupils leave at the end of Year 11 they progress to a range of further education and training. These post-16 institutions compete for pupils at the college's post-16 evening which was held recently and was attended by nearly all Year 11 pupils.
- The college's work to keep pupils healthy is strong. The quality and nutritional value of food served in the canteen has risen thanks to the inspirational work of the canteen leadership, which has struck a sensible balance between providing food that pupils will choose to eat and making it healthier. Students are taught about the risks of smoking, and the 'kick ash' initiative has trained Year 10 pupils in smoking cessation and raised their awareness of smoking-related health conditions. These pupils are trained by health professionals and are now delivering the messages to primary school pupils. The hard-working and well-led physical education department promotes fitness well.
- Children looked after are supported very well by the college and its effective communication with external agencies. As a result they make good progress. A review by the local authority found that the college's work with these pupils was exemplary. Another important aspect of the college's work to support pupils whose particular needs may otherwise be overlooked is the young carers group. While maintaining confidentiality, the college recognises their special circumstances and provides individual support to ensure that they can continue their education.
- The college is effective in communicating with and working with parents. It uses newsletters, letters, emails, telephone calls, home visits, individual meetings, reports, consultation evenings, parent information evenings and the pupil planner. There is a family support adviser and a student support adviser who liaise closely with parents and especially target 'hard-to-reach' parents.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff and pupils told inspectors that behaviour has improved sharply over the last two years. The college's new system, reducing the number of warnings to just one, is mostly working well to manage behaviour.
- In most lessons, and around the college, behaviour is very good. Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning in most lessons, which contributes to their good progress. Movement around the college is managed well, although as the school grows in popularity the narrow corridors are becoming an increasing challenge. Leaders have recognised the increasing numbers using the cafeteria area and are creating additional space to respond.
- In the last three years there have been no permanent exclusions, and the number of fixed-term exclusions is low. The college is proactive in dealing with bullying. The college has a mentoring scheme and uses sensible restorative approaches. The 'on-site alternative provision' area is effective at re-introducing pupils to lessons in the main college and ensuring that pupils who are not yet ready to re-join classes continue to make progress in their work. A parent commended the staff of the 'alternative provision' to inspectors adding, 'they have invested time, energy and commitment with him and it is thanks to them that he is starting to succeed'. A few parents and staff think that because of these approaches the college is insufficiently tough on poor

behaviour. Inspectors did not find evidence to support this view.

- The college has done good work to improve attendance, including making lessons more engaging. As a result, attendance has improved and overall is broadly average. The attendance of some groups of pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is not as good.
- Inspectors observed some inconsistencies regarding the application of the college behaviour policy. Senior leaders are aware of the issue and are providing additional training to help these staff develop their practice. Similarly, although in most instances there is no low-level disruption interfering with learning, in the few lessons where teaching was not planned well enough to keep the interest of all pupils, their attention wandered and some low-level disruption ensued.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- The progress of Year 11 pupils in 2015 during their time in the college was better than for pupils leaving in 2014, but was below average. In 2016 pupils' progress was broadly average according to the government's provisional results information. There is very clear improvement in pupil outcomes across a wide range of subjects including, but not limited to, English and mathematics. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE high-level passes in both English and mathematics has risen sharply and is now above the national average. Inspectors found clear evidence that pupils currently in the college are making better progress than their predecessors. The college's monitoring information points to current Year 11 pupils making even more progress and attaining even better results than those of last summer.
- The most able pupils have traditionally done well at the college. The improvement in progress for all groups of pupils has been driven by the majority of pupils in the middle of the ability range now doing much better than was previously the case. The difference in achievement between boys and girls has narrowed sharply this year.
- Disadvantaged pupils make better progress from their starting points than other pupils with similar starting points nationally. Their progress is very similar to that of other pupils in the college, because leaders analyse the individual needs of all pupils.
- 'The Cabin' provides a highly supportive setting for pupils in the college's specialist provision for children with autism. The care and support in this nurturing environment set them up really well for making progress in lessons in the rest of the college, where they make better than expected progress. This is really effective provision. The progress of pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities is generally in line with that of other pupils in the college. A parent commented, 'my son has special educational needs and the college endeavours to make him fulfil his potential with excellent support'. Another parent spoke about her pride in her son with a disability and his progress from very low attainment on entry to Year 7 to his set of GCSE grades in Year 11.
- Students receive good guidance on their next steps. As a result, the college is rightly proud that each of last year's Year 11 pupils is now in either education, training or employment.



## School details

Unique reference number	137547
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10021245

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	822
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Thomson
Principal	Christopher Terry
Telephone number	01353 662 053
Website	<a href="http://www.witchfordvc.co.uk/">http://www.witchfordvc.co.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@witchfordvc.co.uk">office@witchfordvc.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	4–5 February 2015

## Information about this school

- The college complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Witchford Community College is smaller than the average secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British. Only a small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and only a small number speak English as an additional language.
- At 11%, the proportion of pupils who have disabilities and/or special educational needs is a little below average.
- Approximately 18% of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is a below-average proportion. This additional funding is given to schools for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.

- The college runs a specialist local authority funded resource centre, 'The Cabin', catering for nine pupils who have autism. Pupils are taught with the rest of the college for a range of subjects.
- There are no pupils being educated off-site.
- The principal has been in post since September 2013.
- In 2015, the college met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at GCSE.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils learning in 35 lessons, some of which were seen jointly with a senior leader. In addition several short visits were made to a range of lessons. Inspectors observed pupils at break and lunchtime, before and after lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior, subject and other leaders, four groups of pupils, the chair and three members of the governing body, and the chief executive designate of the multi-academy chain that the college is planning to join.
- Inspectors looked at the 97 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire (Parent View) and 71 staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team scrutinised data about pupils’ achievement, behaviour and attendance, looked at the college’s self-evaluation and improvement plans, read minutes of the meetings of the governing body, scrutinised pupils’ work in lessons and samples of their marked work, and attended staff training.

## Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
John Randall	Her Majesty’s Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O’Shea	Ofsted Inspector
John Mitcheson	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. [www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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