

Portslade Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114599
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338415
Inspection date	23 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Bill Stoneham

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	2–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	929
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David King
Headteacher	Stuart McLaughlin
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
School address	Chalky Road Portslade Brighton BN41 2WS
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Thirty lessons involving 28 different teachers were observed. In addition, meetings were held with the principal, various members of staff, governors, groups of students and with the local authority. The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well the students are taught and whether lessons were consistently challenging
- how well assessment and other data are used to set challenging targets
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of different student groups
- how well leaders and managers at all levels have promoted sustainable improvement.

The team also analysed 154 responses to the questionnaire for parents and carers.

Information about the school

Portslade Community College is an average-sized secondary school which has a sixth form and an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) playgroup. It also provides adult education classes. Services are available to the local community from early morning until late evening. The sixth form centre is situated a short distance away from the main site. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. Most students are White British and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is well below average; very few students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. These relate mainly to behavioural and emotional difficulties or specific learning difficulties

When the college was last inspected in January 2009, it was given a notice to improve. Significant improvement was required in the achievement and standards of students in Years 7 to 11, in the quality of teaching and learning, and the use of assessment information. The present principal took up his post in September 2009.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing and governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Students join the college in Year 7 with attainment that is below the national average. By the time they leave Year 11, their attainment is well below average and the trend over the last three years has been downward. The progress made by all groups, including students with behavioural and emotional difficulties and those with specific learning difficulties, is inadequate.

There are indications that improvements are happening. This is because the newly appointed principal, and a reinvigorated governing body, are tackling the legacy of underachievement. Parents' and carers' views of the college are largely positive. A large majority recorded favourable views of the principal's leadership. As one parent wrote, 'We have been very impressed with the leadership, commitment and enthusiasm of the principal. We feel confident that, given time, he will turn this school around.' Many similar comments were received. Some improvement has taken place since the last inspection, especially in terms of the quality of the curriculum. However, the required improvements in teaching and learning, the use of assessment and the quality of leadership and management at all levels have not been consistent. Nevertheless, relationships between students and with staff are good. Successful efforts have been made to reduce absence and attendance is now average. The support for students is good. In particular, potentially vulnerable students are well cared for with help and guidance tailored to their needs, often involving expertise from outside agencies.

Teaching is unsatisfactory. Too many lessons are barely satisfactory or occasionally inadequate and lack the challenge needed to promote good learning. Although good practice exists, much teaching does not use assessment information to plan strategies that will accelerate students' learning. Marking and other feedback given is often unhelpful and inconsistent in quality; many students are unaware of how they can improve. Progress is frequently no better than satisfactory because staff expectations about what the students can do and about how work should be presented are too low. Much of the work set is undemanding and staff do not adopt consistent approaches to developing the students' literacy skills. The curriculum shows recent improvement. It is now more relevant to students' needs, but many of the changes are recent and have not had time to impact on standards.

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Leadership and management are unsatisfactory overall because some senior and middle leaders lack effectiveness. The principal knows where improvements are needed and has set clear priorities for improvement and established greatly improved systems for monitoring and evaluating the college's performance. One significant improvement has been to energise the governing body. The governors now have a clearer role and are monitoring the college's work with increasing effectiveness. Self-evaluation is improving but is not yet sufficiently accurate and is lacking impact. Many of the steps taken to reverse the college's serious decline are new and at this stage there is insufficient evidence of a positive impact. The capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate. Considerable work remains to be done, but there are early signs of improvement and the morale of many students and members of staff is high, as was reflected in their responses to the questionnaires.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Significantly raise attainment by:
 - improving the quality of learning by ensuring that in all lessons students are set appropriate challenges and are given every opportunity to research ideas and answers for themselves
 - ensuring that all staff have appropriately high expectations for all students and do not devalue learning by setting simplistic and easily completed tasks
 - improving marking and assessment, and ensuring that assessment data are used so that all tasks and activities are carefully tailored to the needs of different groups of students
 - ensuring that in lessons literacy skills are consistently nurtured and students present their work neatly, appropriately and with pride.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels so that self-evaluation is accurate, consistent and can be used to promote sustainable improvements in teaching, students' learning, and other key areas of performance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Expectations for all students are not high enough and outcomes are inadequate. Over the last three years, the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has fallen quite considerably. Attainment in most subjects is below average and often low, with far too few students gaining C grades or higher in their GCSE examinations. There are exceptions, such as history where results are close to the national average, but such occurrences are rare. Learning and progress in lessons are inadequate because not enough teaching inspires or challenges students. Overall, girls make slower progress than boys. Many changes to the curriculum designed to boost attainment are recent and have not had enough time to secure improvements.

Students' behaviour is satisfactory overall, but in some lessons it disturbs the pace and

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quality of learning. A significant minority of parents commented unfavourably about behaviour and are concerned that it is not consistently managed by staff. However, many students demonstrate positive attitudes to college and are willing to take responsibility, making a good contribution to the college and the wider community. Students know what is required to grow up healthily, but not all are keen to exercise or follow a nutritious diet. The college has made improvements in fostering the students' key skills in literacy and numeracy by offering specialist courses, and their preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory. Students say they feel safe and they are confident that any issues that may concern them are dealt with promptly. Students' moral development is satisfactory. Their social understanding is good but their awareness of the many different cultures that make up modern Britain is satisfactory.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching does not consistently demonstrate the qualities required to tackle students' low attainment and unsatisfactory progress. Where learning is most effective, students are set challenging and interesting tasks, are encouraged to work independently or in

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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small groups, and expectations are high. Progress in such cases is usually good and occasionally outstanding, but not enough lessons are of this standard. Where learning is less effective, students are given too few opportunities to demonstrate their understanding; teachers do not check their learning and fail to ensure that they progress. At the heart of weaknesses in teaching is an unsatisfactory use of assessment information. Teachers do not take enough account of the variation in students' aptitudes and skills when they plan and deliver lessons. Consequently, the degree of challenge offered is frequently not high enough and students at all levels, and especially those who are more able, fail to make the progress of which they are capable.

Marking and assessment procedures lack consistency and this too limits progress. Although there are some good cases of sound assessment and good marking, in most subjects students do not consistently receive the guidance they need to make good progress. Moreover, as some teachers have low expectations of the students, work is poorly presented, careless and untidy. Opportunities are missed to capitalise on the development of students' literacy skills.

The curriculum is developing well. Improvements have been made in both key stages, especially in Key Stage 4, where provision now better reflects students' needs. The college runs a wide range of after-school clubs, many of which have good levels of participation.

Students feel safe in college and know who to turn to for advice and help. Staff, especially those who provide additional support for the more potentially vulnerable, know students well. Students who have behavioural and emotional difficulties or specific learning difficulties benefit from support that is well tailored to their needs. Impartial advice and guidance help students to make informed choices about their future and ease their transition into post-16 education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal is acutely aware of the many weaknesses that exist. Along with the improved and more active governing body, he has set about establishing a structure intended to offer sustainable improvement. Hitherto, the actions taken by many college leaders and managers have not embedded ambition or secured improvements, particularly in teaching or attainment. The quality of monitoring is improving and is now satisfactory. The use of assessment information to set all students challenging targets

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has been implemented; such actions are a cultural shift for college staff and will take time to become embedded, but a more demanding agenda has been set.

Monitoring by the governing body has improved; the governors are keen to support and challenge the college on its actions and priorities and engage with parents. All appropriate policies are in place and are monitored. Safeguarding is satisfactory. The college is strongly committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all, although leaders are aware that certain groups are not making sufficient progress. The college has positive relationships with parents with regular, helpful information sent home. Partnerships are helping the college to develop a more suitable curriculum. For example, in consortium with other local providers, the college is now offering diploma and other courses which are deemed to be more suitable for the needs of the students. Community cohesion is satisfactory, with some good aspects in college and the local community particularly in work undertaken with a local special school and through the contribution made by college students to dance and arts festivals in Brighton. As part of its improvement programme, the college is looking to promote community cohesion beyond its immediate locality.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Judged at the last inspection to be outstanding, the service continues to give children an excellent environment in which their personal development is nourished through a wide range of activities, excellent supervision and highly positive relationships.

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On entry to the playgroup the skills of some children are below average but the children make outstanding progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage so that by the time they leave their skills are well above average. Their progress is tracked by meticulous recording and assessment. Every aspect of their educational development is plotted to ensure that children are each given the individual attention they need to prepare them for transition to their next school. Parents confirm that their children are happy and well cared for by the 'fantastic' staff. They are kept well informed through regular communications and enjoy opportunities to visit the playgroup.

The children's behaviour and personal relationships are excellent. In the kindly and relaxed environment they learn about the wider world, developing excellent personal and social maturity, as well as high levels of competency in numeracy and literacy and the more formal technical skills involved in art, design and movement.

The setting continues to improve. Self-evaluation is detailed, thorough and accurate, showing a commitment to providing the highest possible standard of service and an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

The sixth form is providing a satisfactory standard of education. The sixth form is relatively small and this restricts the range of courses available. There is a satisfactory range of academic courses but a more limited choice of vocational options or other courses for those who were less successful at GCSE. Students are positive about the sixth form and feel they are well cared for and their views and opinions are valued. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers and with each other. Teaching is satisfactory with some good features and this contributes to students making satisfactory progress. The college has an inclusive approach; consequently, many students enter the sixth form with below average attainment. The standards they attain at the end of their courses of study are below average but are improving. This represents satisfactory achievement. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and contribute to the college and wider community through voluntary service activities and fundraising. A number of local and national charities have benefited from financial support from the college. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Self-evaluation is accurate and identifies appropriate areas for further improvement. This has led to recent improvements in attendance and punctuality,

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although more still needs to be done.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
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

About 16% of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most responses were positive, but a significant number expressed concerns about the quality of teaching, the level of support offered, how well the students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and about behaviour. The views of parents and carers in relation to the quality of teaching and behaviour reflect the inspection evidence. A number of parents made written comments. These were mainly favourable and overwhelmingly made reference to the leadership of the principal. The principal has made an instant and positive impression and has considerable parental support.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Portslade Community College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the college.

The inspection team received 154 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 929 students registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	22	96	62	18	12	6	4
The school keeps my child safe	31	20	97	63	15	10	7	5
The school informs me about my child's progress	73	47	73	47	5	3	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	27	87	56	20	13	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	21	14	91	59	29	19	5	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	21	88	57	27	18	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	12	87	56	30	19	2	1
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)	28	18	87	56	18	12	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	19	91	59	22	14	7	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	16	80	52	24	16	13	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	16	83	54	26	17	7	5
The school is led and managed effectively	38	25	78	51	20	13	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	24	85	55	17	11	8	5

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 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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 pupil's 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.



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26 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Portslade Community College, Brighton BN41 2WS

My colleagues and I enjoyed our recent visit. Thank you for making us so welcome. As a result of the inspection, we have judged that although some aspects of the college are good and there are signs of improvement, the overall quality of education is inadequate and the college requires 'special measures' to help it improve further. We noted a number of weaknesses including levels of attainment, the progress you make, the quality of teaching and aspects of leadership and management.

The curriculum you are offered is satisfactory and improving, and the quality of care, guidance and support is good. The provision in the playgroup is outstanding and the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. As many of you and your parents noted in your questionnaires, you are impressed with the new principal, but some of you are worried about the misbehaviour of a minority. Inspection evidence supports your comments.

In order for the college to improve, we have asked the principal and the staff to raise attainment by:

- ensuring that the quality of lessons improves
- staff having higher expectations of what you can achieve and setting you more challenging work
- staff taking more care in the way they mark and assess your work
- ensuring that all of you present your work well
- staff evaluating the college's performance more accurately so that they can identify improvements needed and take the necessary actions.

You can play your part in securing improvements by ensuring that you all behave well and that you always take pride and care in all your work.

Thank you again for making us so welcome. We enjoyed meeting you and would like to wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham

Lead inspector

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