

Inspection of a good school: West Somerset College

Bircham Road, Alcombe, Minehead, Somerset TA24 6AY

Inspection dates:

3–4 March 2020

Outcome

West Somerset College continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that one or more areas may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils achieve well. Pupils learn how to think like subject experts. Leaders push all pupils to achieve their potential. Disadvantaged pupils do especially well. When poor behaviour does not interfere with their learning, most pupils enjoy their lessons. They feel challenged and encouraged to do their best.

The sixth form is growing. Students enjoy sixth-form life. They get help and advice from their tutors in deciding their next steps. They appreciate the personalised support they get from subject teachers. Students in the sixth form are self-directing. They have the confidence to arrange trips to complement their learning, such as to the theatre to see 'Othello'.

The school serves a large area. Teachers work closely with their counterparts in the local middle schools so that pupils make a smooth transition into Year 9. Leaders make sure that the curriculum matches pupils' interests. Pupils can now study Spanish as well as French.

Pupils move around the school calmly and sensibly. They have respectful conversations with staff, for example about their uniform, which they wear well. In most lessons, we saw good behaviour. However, pupils told us that behaviour is not good in other lessons. Both parents and pupils worry about bullying. They would like staff to get better at dealing with bullying.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders offer a broad and rich curriculum to pupils. They encourage pupils to choose courses, including history or geography, and a language. Pupils are also able to study in a range of creative and technical subjects. In the sixth form, students can select from an

even wider range of A levels and vocational courses. The trustees aim to offer a pathway for everyone.

Pupils spend three years working on their GCSEs. Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum which goes beyond preparing pupils for exams. In English, pupils compare essays on poverty written during the Victorian period. This broadens their knowledge, ready for when they meet nineteenth-century texts in their English literature GCSE.

Leaders have detailed curriculum plans. They have set out a route through the curriculum for each group of pupils. They have identified the important knowledge that all pupils must learn and remember. Teachers question and test pupils well. Pupils gain confidence from the encouraging feedback they get, for example in art.

Pupils have rich reading experiences in English, but they are not in the habit of reading in their own time. Pupils are not sure how to borrow books from the school library. Leaders have plans to improve reading across the school, but these are in their infancy.

The vast majority of pupils do not study a foreign language. Leaders have plans to address this. They have started to put their plans into action. Teachers now visit pupils in the middle schools. They build good relationships and talk about the benefits of learning a language.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported in lessons. Teachers receive comprehensive information on how to adapt teaching for individual pupils. The trust helps leaders in the school to improve provision for pupils with SEND. However, parents do not have confidence in the school's work because they do not receive clear information on how teachers support pupils.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Yet pupils say that behaviour is poor in some of their lessons and around school. Parents express their concerns about this. A minority of pupils do not act with respect. Leaders keep a close eye on bullying and have good processes in place to deal with bullying reported to them. Despite this, pupils and their parents do not readily report bullying to staff. Leaders need to win the confidence of families in their ability to resolve bullying.

Pupils in key stage 4 learn about the different beliefs and views of world religions. They debate big questions and discuss ethical matters. Pupils develop tolerant attitudes over time. Leaders use assemblies to promote the school's stance against racism and bullying. In the sixth form, students choose an 'enrichment' activity, for example philosophy or learning sign language.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff keep detailed records. They know how to report their concerns and follow these up.

Staff training is up to date. They are alert to the local risks to pupils, for example of exploitation and neglect.

Staff share information with each other and with other professionals well. They take a proactive approach when they think a pupil might need help. Pupils benefit from a range of supportive services. Often this prevents things getting worse.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Through the curriculum in English, pupils read widely. However, pupils do not read independently or for pleasure. They do not develop the habit of reading and this limits their understanding of the world. Leaders should encourage pupils to read regularly.
- More pupils are choosing to study a foreign language as a result of the work of leaders to encourage this. It is still the case that too few pupils obtain a qualification in a language. Governors must ensure that leaders' ambitious plans for language learning in the school are implemented successfully.
- Pupils with SEND receive appropriate support from their teachers in lessons. Leaders have thought carefully about the information that is provided to teachers. They strive to make this useful. However, parents do not understand the adaptations that are being made. Leaders should ensure that parents understand how teachers will support their child, especially at the point of transition.
- Although leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and have a clear policy in place to address this, the behaviour of some pupils remains poor. Pupils still experience disruption to lessons. Some pupils feel uneasy as they move around the school. Leaders must ensure that pupils develop respectful attitudes towards their peers, their teachers and the school environment. They must check that their policies are effective in improving the behaviour of pupils.
- Staff do not tolerate bullying. When bullying is reported to staff, they work hard to resolve it. They check up on pupils who have been bullied in the days and weeks afterwards to make sure that they feel happy and safe. Despite this, some families do not trust that bullying will be stopped if they report it. Leaders should develop a culture in which pupils and parents report and re-report bullying more readily.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 17–18 May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136791
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10111605
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	746
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	149
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andy Berry
Headteacher	Gregg Mockridge
Website	http://www.westsomersetcollege.org/
Date of previous inspection	17–18 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- West Somerset College is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are white British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is lower than average.
- The school uses Project One as an alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

- We carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, history and art. We visited lessons, accompanied by senior leaders from the school. In addition, we met with staff, scrutinised pupils' work, held discussions with groups of pupils, talked with pupils around the site, interviewed curriculum leaders and examined curriculum plans.

- We interviewed the designated safeguarding leader and other leaders from the trust. We talked to groups of staff about the safeguarding training they receive and the processes and culture of safeguarding in the school. We discussed with pupils the extent to which they feel safe.
- Before the inspection, we conducted a telephone interview with the headteacher. During the inspection, we met with a senior leader from the trust, a group of governors from the local board, the senior teacher who leads on behaviour and the special educational needs coordinator.
- We considered 117 responses to the pupil survey, 87 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, and 65 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Lydia Pride, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Gill Hickling

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