

Inspection of West Somerset College

Bircham Road, Alcombe, Minehead, Somerset TA24 6AY

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

West Somerset College is an inclusive school. Pupils follow a broad curriculum. They are well supported in their transition from other schools into Year 9. Many pupils say they enjoy school and have positive relationships with staff. However, pupils' experience of school and the quality of education they currently receive are variable.

Behaviour at the school is improving. Pupils say that bullying is now rare. They have confidence in staff to resolve any incidents quickly. Leaders do not tolerate the use of discriminatory language. As a result, pupils feel safe at school. In most lessons, they benefit from a calm and focused learning environment. Nevertheless, there are still too many incidents of anti-social behaviour around the school.

Pupils take up a growing number of opportunities beyond the academic curriculum. Some sixth-form students have recently returned from a trip to New York, for example. The school has recently performed its first drama and musical production in many years. Such opportunities develop pupils' confidence and create a sense of community. Pupils receive helpful guidance to support them with planning their next steps in education or employment.

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

Senior leaders, including trust leaders and governors, have a clear vision for the improvement of the school. The recent appointment of the headteacher and other senior staff is starting to have an impact on raising standards at the school.

Leaders have reviewed the content of the curriculum and how they want it to be taught. It is now focused on building pupils' knowledge and supporting them with remembering it over time. Subject leaders have thought carefully about the order in which pupils learn each unit of work. However, in some subjects, the curriculum is not delivered as effectively, and the choice of learning activities does not suit the needs of pupils.

Students in the sixth form study a range of academic and vocational courses. Teaching supports most students to make the transition to higher-level study successfully. However, there are some who need further support to develop their ability to learn independently.

Teachers use a range of approaches to check pupils' understanding. In the most successful examples, this information is then used purposefully to plan what comes next. Nevertheless, some pupils find it challenging to use what they remember from their previous learning to help them with what comes next.

Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Leaders ensure their specific needs are identified quickly when they join the school. The progress of pupils with SEND is reviewed regularly. However, although leaders guide staff towards a range of strategies to support some learners, they are not always used.

Leaders have raised their expectations of pupils' conduct. This has led to an increase in sanctions. However, the number of physical incidents has reduced. Although there is a clear behaviour approach in place, staff are not always supported to apply it consistently.

The overall attendance in all year groups is too low. Too many pupils are persistently absent from school. Leaders recognise this and have revised their strategies to increase attendance. There are signs this is starting to have a positive impact.

Leaders have prioritised the development of a culture of reading since the previous inspection. They believe that all pupils should read widely, for pleasure and to understand the wider world. Pupils who need additional support with their reading receive the help they need to catch up with their peers.

Pupils learn about important issues, such as online safety, relationships and fundamental British Values. However, some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders have started to check how well the personal development curriculum is taught across the school. They recognise there are improvements still to be made.

Careers education is effective. Pupils learn about different types of careers and the qualifications and skills each one requires. Students in the sixth form value opportunities to have one-to-one discussions with their tutors. Some take part in leadership activities, such as organising events for the wider school.

Leaders provide parents with opportunities to visit the school and speak with leaders to raise any questions or concerns. Despite this, a significant number of parents remain dissatisfied with the provision the school provides for their child.

Many staff enjoy working at the school and say they are well supported by leaders. However, there are some staff who feel undervalued and say their well-being is not prioritised by leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff, including governors, receive regular and appropriate safeguarding training. This is supported by newsletters for staff which update them on support for vulnerable pupils and additional training opportunities. Leaders keep detailed records of any concerns and take effective action to keep pupils safe. This includes working with a wide range of external services.

Pupils say they feel safe and have a trusted adult they can talk to. Leaders have put in place appropriate curriculum and school-wide policies and practice in relation to sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence (including sexualised language) in and around the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The overall attendance of pupils across the school is too low. Therefore, some pupils, including some students in the sixth form, are missing a significant amount of learning time. Leaders should ensure that the attendance of all groups of pupils improves rapidly.
- Some staff say they do not feel supported by leaders with managing incidents of poor behaviour. Some parents also raise concerns about this. Therefore, some pupils demonstrate poor behaviour that does not meet leaders' expectations, particularly during unstructured times. Leaders should ensure that staff are supported to implement the agreed approaches to managing behaviour so that incidents reduce.
- In some subjects, including the personal, social, health and economic curriculum, the curriculum is not taught consistently well by all teachers. This means that pupils have a variable experience and do not build their knowledge of that subject successfully over time. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is taught to a high standard across all subjects.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	10256615
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	768
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	143
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andy Berry
Headteacher	Nicola Doughty
Website	www.westsomersetcollege.org
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 March 2020

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders, the acting chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the trust and a trustee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, business studies, modern foreign languages and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record of adults working in the school. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader to consider how well the school identifies pupils who are at risk and engages with external services. Inspectors also spoke with a range of pupils and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents and carers, Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the staff survey and responses to the survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Kelly Olive, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Morgan	Ofsted Inspector
David Simons	Ofsted Inspector
Tracey Reynolds	His Majesty's Inspector

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