

INSPECTION REPORT

SOHAM VILLAGE COLLEGE

Soham, Ely

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique reference number: 110909

Headteacher: Howard Gilbert

Reporting inspector: R Peter J McGregor
3525

Dates of inspection: 1-3 April, 2003

Inspection number: 253426
Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11-16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Sand Street
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: John Thorogood

Date of previous inspection: March 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Soham Village College, a foundation technology college, provides education for pupils in Years 7 to 11, who transfer from a range of near and distant primary schools. About fifty per cent of the pupils travel to the college by bus each day. The college is bigger than most other comprehensives with 1314 pupils aged 11-16, and has steadily increased in size over recent years. About eighty per cent of pupils transfer at the age of sixteen to sixth form colleges or to schools with sixth forms. Virtually all the remainder go into employment. The number of boys and girls in the college is similar in each year group. Most of the pupils are white and very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Very few of the pupils do not have English as their mother tongue. A small number of pupils are the children of travellers. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs, eighteen per cent, is broadly in line with the national average. About a quarter of these pupils are at the higher stages of need. About two per cent of pupils have Statements, a similar proportion to that found in most schools. Special educational needs are mainly dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties, and multi-sensory impairment.

Judgements made in this report about national test results taken in Year 9 and at GCSE sometimes refer to similar schools. These are non-selective schools with between five and nine per cent of pupils taking free school meals, as the school has roughly this proportion, a below average figure. A small number of pupils arrived or left other than at the usual times of admission and transfer, indicating below average mobility. Pupils of a full range of prior attainment attend the college. Standards on entry are above average in mathematics and English and average in science. Overall standards are above average. The area around the school is socially and economically mixed but advantaged overall. About ten per cent of the staff leave the college each year and at the time of the inspection the school had about seven per cent of the staff on temporary or short-term contracts.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Soham Village College is a very good school. It provides a caring learning environment where pupils are well taught and they strive for success. Pupils do very well in examinations, achieving very good GCSE results – seventy per cent of the pupils achieved five or more A*-C grades and ninety-eight per cent attained five or more A*-G passes in 2002. The pupils' achievements are very good. The leadership provided by the principal, supported by the governors and his senior staff, is of the highest quality. College management, with its strong focus on making teaching and learning as effective as possible for individual pupils, is very successful. In all areas of college life, what is provided is of good, very good or excellent quality and the outcome is mature, confident young pupils who are thoroughly prepared for the next stage in their lives. The college has the capacity to improve further and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Well above average attainment in GCSE examinations and very good achievement
- A great sense of community, with very good resources and a well cared for school environment, where relationships are very good and all are concerned for the well-being of the pupils
- Some very good and excellent teaching, where teachers have high expectations, are enthusiastic, and are knowledgeable about their subjects.
- A very broad and balanced curriculum with strengths in the range of subjects offered, the extended school day and the range of clubs and activities available
- Very good behaviour and pupil attitudes to learning
- Outstanding leadership and careful, rigorous and far-sighted management, with a strong emphasis on improving pupils' learning and achievement.

What could be improved

No significant issues were identified for improvement.

In a small minority of lessons, however, teaching was not as effective as it should be.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college has made very good progress since it was last inspected. In March 1997 the college was judged to be good, where pupils made sound to good progress and attained above average standards. Teaching was good, leadership and relationships very good, and management sound. All areas of strength have been maintained, or further improved, and areas of weakness acted upon. Pupils' attainment is now higher and well above average at the age of sixteen. Six years ago, pupils' progress was reported as being sound to good; today it is very good. The overall quality of teaching is better, with a higher proportion of very good or excellent lessons and a lower proportion that are unsatisfactory, compared with 1997. Leadership is now outstanding, and management is judged to be much improved and now very good.

Six years ago, the curriculum was found to be insufficiently broad and too many pupils failed to complete courses they started. Since then, work-related courses have been introduced, the range of GCSE courses expanded and almost all pupils finish courses they start in Year 10. Information and communication technology (ICT) requirements are now fully met and pupils are confident and effective users of computers. The electrical safety checks referred to in the last report as not being carried out are now completed. Pupils' progress was not monitored sufficiently well in 1997, but now individual subject teachers, tutors, heads of year and department, make pupils aware of their targets and monitor their progress, for example, against predicted GCSE grades. The spiritual and moral basis of the college is excellent and much improved, and is the bedrock upon which the success of the college is based.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	very high A* well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E very low E*

In end of Year 9 national tests taken in 2002, pupils' attainment was well above average in all three of the core subjects, English, maths and science, with well above average performance overall at the higher levels. Comparing the pupils' test scores with those in schools with pupils from similar backgrounds, using the average points scored by each pupil, the pupils' attainment was well above average. When the pupils' results at age fourteen are compared with their test scores at the age of eleven, using the average points scored by pupils, the results indicate that they made excellent progress and achieved very well indeed. The pupils' results in all three subjects were very high, in the top five per cent of all schools nationally that started off with a similar standard on entry. The trend of improvement in the college's results in Year 9 over the past five years up to 2002 was broadly in line with the national trend.

At GCSE, improvement over the five-year period to 2002 was above the national trend. The proportions of pupils attaining five A*-C, five A*-G and one A*-G passes were all well above national averages in 2002. Compared with schools that achieved similarly high scores in Year 9 tests in 2000, GCSE results at Soham are similar, indicating that pupils are building on their excellent work in Years 7, 8 and 9. In nearly all GCSE subjects, pupils' attainment was similar to or above national averages, with particularly high attainment in ICT, music, history, art and design, and design and technology. When comparisons are made between subjects, taking account of the commitment and capabilities of the pupils taking each subject, the highest results were in history, music, design and technology, biology, geography and English. Those subjects where work was relatively less successful were German and French and dual award science.

The college has exceeded its GCSE targets for the past two years and is on track to do so again in 2003. In 2002, seventy per cent of pupils gained five A*-C grades, compared with a target of sixty-three per cent.

Current standards are similar to those achieved last year in the end of Year 9 tests and at GCSE. Strengths are being maintained in subjects such as English, history and design and technology. Staffing difficulties have been largely overcome in modern foreign languages and so standards in French and German are better than in 2002. In all subjects, the work taking place on improving the quality of teaching and learning is having a good impact on standards. Achievement is very good throughout the college because pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning and teaching is effective.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils move around the college calmly and purposefully. They show obvious enjoyment in their life at school. Pupils appreciate the very good range of activities available and how the staff help them to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils have a clear understanding of what is good conduct and almost all conform to the high standards expected of them in lessons. Behaviour around the college is excellent. Both parents and pupils believe that behaviour is very good and that pupils are considerate to one another. The rate of exclusions is lower than average.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils listen very attentively and show interest in their lessons. They quickly settle to work, making very good use of time. Pupils show increasing maturity as they move up the school. In Year 11, their attitudes to learning are excellent. All pupils take an active part in college life. Responsibilities are taken seriously, although pupils would like more. Pupils appreciate that they are consulted on school developments. Relationships are very good. Pupils and staff show great respect for one another.
Attendance	Average and sound overall. Unauthorised absence is much lower than nationally and very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good and very good in Years 10 and 11. About three-quarters of the lessons seen were good or better, with over half of these very good or excellent where pupils made rapid and successful progress. The quality of teaching in a very small number of lessons was unsatisfactory. The college's teaching and learning research programme is having a very good impact on the pupils' experiences in the classroom, as work is made more interesting, relevant and appropriate to the needs of individuals.

Teaching observed in English was very good indeed, and in science and maths the quality was good. Particular strengths in teaching in these subjects and others are the subject knowledge and understanding of staff, a reflective approach involving pupils in their learning, high expectations and very good relationships. Where teaching was less effective, usually in lower attaining sets, the pace of work was slower, individual needs were not always met and one or two pupils tried to interrupt lessons. Pupils with special educational needs are usually

effectively taught. A good focus on pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across subjects is helping pupils to learn. ICT is effectively taught in specific lessons in Years 7 to 9 and the skills learnt are applied well in Years 10 and 11. Pupils want to do well; they work hard and use their knowledge and skills very successfully.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. A very wide range of subjects is offered, from Latin to a work-related curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in the large number of activities, including music, performing arts, sports, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and subject support sessions. The personal, social and health programme is well planned, with an appropriate emphasis on sex and drugs education, but it is not always consistently implemented. Curriculum links with other groups outside the college are very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The team of learning support assistants effectively helps pupils to learn. Teachers know pupils' needs well and generally respond well to them. Individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs guide teaching and learning in most lessons, but not all.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Effective. The very small number of pupils at an early stage of acquiring English are given help in improving their language skills. Very good support is provided to enable these pupils to play a full part in school life.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent, in all areas. Staff provide an environment where pupils are encouraged to think before they act and to reflect on what they are doing, both in lessons and around the college. Pupils are trusted to use the very good facilities available and to take responsibility for their actions. Many opportunities are provided for social interaction between pupils and between staff and pupils. Good humour and enjoyment are key elements of college life. Local and international cultures are celebrated and valued. Developing pupils' understanding of right and wrong is at the core of the college's work.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The closely linked pastoral and academic systems provide very effective support for individual pupils. Pupils find the targets set for them motivating as they give them clear objectives to aim for. Assessment is effective. The college is safe and caring with good supervision provided at breaks and during the lunch period. Staff work closely with pupils and their parents to maximise attendance and minimise misbehaviour.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Outstanding leadership is provided by the principal and management is very successful throughout the college. Delegation is very effective. Senior managers, heads of year and heads of departments work closely together for the benefit of the pupils. An emphasis on collaboration, effective learning, and respect for others underpin all that takes place in the college. There is a shared commitment to improve further.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors support the principal and his staff and are very knowledgeable about the college. They rigorously oversee what takes places, but do not interfere with day-by-day management. They are aware of the great strengths of the college, the progress that has been made in recent years and

	areas for improvement. They appreciate the ethos that stems from the principal's approach. An act of collective worship is provided but not daily for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The college development plan provides clear guidance on priority areas for improvement, and progress against these areas is monitored. The quality of teaching and learning is regularly evaluated as part of the planned programme of faculty reviews, as well as through on-going departmental and senior management observation of lessons. Some inconsistencies remain in the approach of middle managers to monitoring teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Technology college additional funding is used well to maintain very good ICT facilities. Staff are knowledgeable and effective. Departments are very well resourced, the accommodation is very well maintained and of a high order, and all the resources available are used for the benefit of the pupils. The very good learning resource centre is well used.

The approach of the staff, and the procedures everyone follows, help the college to achieve the best value that it can with the resources available. Information on pupils' exam results is used to monitor their success so that extra help can be provided where needed. Courses are reviewed to make sure that they suit the pupils' needs. The school asks for the views of pupils, parents and others in the community and takes account of them. Once the decision is made on what the school should provide, plans are implemented very efficiently.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children's behaviour • the quality of leadership and management of the college • how comfortable they feel when asking questions of college staff • the quality of teaching • the way the college helps children to become mature and responsible adults • the progress children make in their studies • the high expectations of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the amount of homework • the quality of annual reports on pupils' progress • the way in which the college works with parents

Parents have very favourable views of the education provided at Soham Village College. All the positive points that came out of the parents' questionnaire responses and from the meeting with parents are supported by the inspectors, particularly the very good pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning, the outstanding leadership of the college, excellent ethos, and very high staff expectations. Homework is not always set, however, and annual reports are not as useful to pupils and parents as they could be. Several parents stated in their questionnaires that the college did not work closely enough with them. This dissatisfaction was not stated at the parents' meeting and is not borne out by the inspectors' findings.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Well above average attainment in GCSE examinations and very good achievement

1. Pupils of a full range of ability and prior knowledge enter the college at age eleven, but with rather more higher attainers, and so the entry standard into Year 7, overall, is above average. Pupils make excellent progress in the three core subjects as they move through Key Stage 3, building on their prior knowledge. A combination of good teaching, thorough and effective preparation for the tests and the very good attitudes and application of the pupils themselves, result in excellent achievement. These high standards have been maintained for several years.
2. At the end of Year 9, pupils' results are well above national averages. In the national tests taken in 2002 at the age of fourteen in English, mathematics and science, about four-fifths of the pupils attained level 5 and about a half level 6 or above. The overall proportion of higher level attainment was greatest in English and science. However, of the significant number who attained level 7, proportions were higher in English and mathematics than in science. Girls outperformed the boys in English, and in mathematics and science their results were similar, reflecting the national pattern of attainment by gender. The trend in the pupils' results shows some fluctuation year by year, variation that is tracked by the school and found to reflect differences in attainment on entry to Soham in different years.
3. In the three core subjects, and in others observed being taught during the inspection, current standards were found to be as good as in previous years. In a Year 9 English lesson, pupils were given revision material from an internet site, on how to use writing to 'persuade', 'argue' and 'advise'. Virtually all pupils contributed to initial class discussion, speaking clearly and giving detailed explanations. They wrote quickly, at length and could explain their choice of appropriate emotive vocabulary. Scrutiny of pupils' books in several subjects showed very high expectations, thorough syllabus coverage, and work completed with care and attention to detail and presentation. These high levels of attainment in Key Stage 3 ensure that pupils are very well prepared for their GCSE and work-related courses in Key Stage 4.
4. In Years 10 and 11, the pupils' achievements are very good. They build on their earlier studies most effectively. The pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and sometimes excellent, and the quality of teaching is very good and slightly better than in Key Stage 3. The outcome of these teaching and learning characteristics is high standards. The proportion of pupils attaining five A*-C grades in 2002 was well above that found nationally. For the past five years the proportion has been around 70 per cent. The proportions attaining five A*-G passes and one A*-G pass were equally good in 2002. These A*-G results show a steadily improving pattern, indicating that the quality of teaching and learning for lower attaining pupils has been getting better for several years.
5. GCSE information for 2002 indicates that pupils attained well above average, or higher, results compared with the national picture, in ICT, music, history, art and design, design and technology, English, mathematics, business studies and geography. German was the only subject where results were below national averages. When account is taken of pupils' known ability and attainment in all their subjects, their highest achievements were in history, music, biology, design and technology, English and geography. The least successful subjects were German, French and dual award science.
6. Current standards seen in lessons and pupils' work are as good as the 2002 GCSE results indicate, with clear improvements made in both French and German as staffing difficulties have been overcome. In a Year 11 French lesson where pupils were expressing their views on the environment, higher attainers gave detailed, fluent and accurate responses and written work of all pupils showed they were making very good progress in their learning. A high attaining science class, using data to establish a formula for the chemical magnesium oxide, generated a large amount of accurate and well-presented work, showing very good understanding of a difficult topic.

7. The overall picture is one of very hard working pupils who are effectively taught, who build on what they have already learnt and as a result achieve high standards in their GCSE examinations. Parents appreciate the high academic standards achieved at the college.

A great sense of community, with very good resources and a well cared for school environment, where relationships are very good and all are concerned for the well-being of the pupils

8. The college has been in the situation where many of the staff and pupils have experienced unprecedented anxiety over the past year as they have come to terms with the deaths of two children from the local community. The governors, staff, parents, pupils and all those within the local area have helped one another to cope with what has taken place and benefited from an exceptionally strong community, where providing for and responding to individual needs is of paramount importance.
9. Provision for pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils are encouraged to think and then reflect upon their actions, and this approach is embedded in college life. Teachers listen carefully and patiently to their pupils and vice-versa. Pupils are keen to participate in voluntary activities, such as older ones helping younger in paired reading sessions. In lessons, opportunities are found to discuss spiritual issues such as the use of music in war settings. Provision for moral and social development is equally good. Pupils are taught what is acceptable behaviour and older pupils help to instil this understanding in younger ones. Each year group adopts its own charity, and raises funds for it. Pupils have access to the college's computers and other facilities and know they are trusted to use them sensibly. Year 11 pupils arrange their own end of year 'prom' attended by most of the year group. The school council enables pupils to have a voice in managing the college, and the governing body has adopted suggestions from the council to retain registration in tutor groups at the start of the afternoon. A number of senior pupils, however, would like more opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of college life. The state of the WCs is a concern for the pupils and, as a result of a school council discussion, they are now monitoring the way these facilities are used. The poor quality of some of the WCs makes this a difficult task. The college celebrates the national culture and the cultures of many other countries. Theatre visits as well as residential trips to several countries take place each year. Many visitors are welcomed, such as the Poet Laureate and second-world-war Jewish evacuees who live in the local area. The college has an international school award, has developed links with Tanzania and Malawi and is involved in establishing an ICT project with a school in Montreal.
10. All involved with the college show respect for the environment where they work. The school buildings are very well cared for, clean and well decorated with virtually no graffiti, and resources are sufficient and of a very good quality in all subjects. ICT facilities are very good and used most effectively by the pupils – a great improvement upon the situation described in the last inspection report in 1997 when ICT facilities and use were unsatisfactory. Displays are interesting and up-to-date, and pupils appreciate what is provided for them. The ethos, which emanates from the principal and his senior team, is one of care and respect, where the quality of the learning environment is given top priority, as well as expectations of effective teaching and learning and high standards.

Some very good and excellent teaching, where teachers have high expectations, are enthusiastic, and are knowledgeable about their subjects

11. In the best lessons observed, the teaching was of the very highest quality. Pupils enjoyed learning, worked extremely hard and made rapid and very successful progress. In each of these lessons, teachers had planned their work thoroughly, knew exactly what they wanted to achieve and discussed their learning intentions with the pupils. Planning was carefully adapted, depending upon how pupils responded to what was taught, ensuring that tasks were always appropriate and challenging. The hour-long lessons were broken down into smaller units and times were allocated for work to be completed. Videos, practical tasks and group work in the middle parts of lessons helped to maintain interest and motivation. Because teachers have a very good understanding of their subjects, know what examination boards require and enjoy teaching, the pupils hold them in high regard. Pupils' questions were answered skilfully and the questions themselves used to tease out where pupils had misconceptions. At the end of these high quality lessons, pupils' understanding was tested to enable the teacher to know

what should next be taught and to enable the pupils to appreciate both the progress they had made and points for improvement.

12. The college has invested in substantial, modern ICT facilities, and has a large number of computers available. Several teachers, particularly in science, have access to interactive white boards and digital projectors. The use of this equipment often led to lessons of quality, contributing to the professional skills of the teachers. The pupils appreciated the use of real images on the screen, the ease with which they could read printed, good-size script – compared with the usual more variable blackboard or whiteboard handwriting – and the very careful structuring of lessons. When inspectors tracked pupils for a full day, where interactive digital facilities were available for some lessons but not others, it was clear how beneficial the ICT equipment was in motivating pupils and retaining their involvement in what was being taught.
13. In a Year 7 English lesson for a high ability class, pupils looked at identifying and tracing tension in text, using 'The Tulip Touch' by Anne Fine, an author who had recently visited the college. The lesson started with a very effective review of previous work before the learning intentions of the session were discussed. Earlier work was linked to the task, giving pupils confidence to carry out the demanding work. Relationships between the teacher and class members were excellent. Pupils who did not volunteer answers were questioned, ensuring that all understood the work. Pupils had to think for themselves, predicting what might be found in later chapters. Correct terminology was used throughout the lesson. A bar chart was constructed showing how the tension grew as the book was read. In the final pulling together of the lesson it was clear that achievement was very good indeed and the pupils' enjoyment of learning had been outstanding. In a similarly effective and excellent GCSE physics revision lesson in Year 11, the interactive whiteboard, question sheets, and questioning and discussion, enabled all pupils to improve their knowledge. Pupils' answers were followed up with further probing questions, pairs discussed their answers to check understanding, and individuals were asked to go through calculations using the whiteboard. When individuals' responses showed a lack of knowledge, further excellent explanations by the teacher ensured misunderstandings were clarified. The teacher was aware of how individual pupils learnt best, for example kinaesthetic learners stood holding paper cups to represent coulombs of charge and chocolate sweets were passed round to represent the use of energy in the transfer of charge. This most effective lesson ensured that the pupils' understanding of electricity was much better at the end of the lesson than at the beginning.
14. The University of Cambridge education department is supporting a number of research projects, initiated by Soham Village College, on teaching and learning skills. These are having a very good impact on practice in the college. Several of the successful teaching and learning characteristics identified in the research were seen in observed lessons. The use of mind maps in science, regular reviews in modern foreign languages, reviews at the starts and ends of lessons in design and technology and visualisation in physical education are some of the successful techniques employed. In a very successful Year 7 physical education lesson, for example, pupils looked at pictures of Olympic gymnasts, then closed their eyes and visualised their own positions before carrying out the gymnastic activity required. This reflective approach resulted in very good progress and achievement for each pupil.
15. Not all lessons seen were as effective as they could have been. The college's successful teaching and learning strategies are not always consistently applied which results in a small minority of lessons where groups of pupils make insufficient or barely satisfactory progress. In some lower attaining sets, work was not well matched to the pupils' prior learning, and expectations of conduct and pace of work were too low. For example, in one lesson, textbooks were issued which a number of pupils struggled to comprehend, and the pace of work was too slow because too much detailed information was provided by the teacher. When pupils chattered about matters not concerned with the lesson, they were allowed to do so. As noise levels built up, the method of control, to shout above the noise, was unsuccessful. In a lower attaining class, work was not well enough matched to pupils' needs and time was spent on organisation rather than teaching and learning. Expectations were unclear as to the amount of work individuals should complete, with the result that insufficient effort was applied by some pupils.
16. Teachers generally, with the help of learning support assistants, enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress in lessons. Pupils' individual education plans are not well known by all staff, however, and targets specific to individual subjects are not sufficiently clear. The school's

intranet includes individual education plan information, but staff do not hold paper copies of targets and these are needed to remind teachers and pupils of subject specific learning targets.

17. Many of the parents remarked upon how good the quality of teaching is and how it has a very good impact on what their children achieve across many subjects.

A very broad and balanced curriculum with strengths in the range of subjects offered, the extended school day and the range of clubs and activities available

18. The curriculum has been improved substantially since the last inspection six years ago and is now very good. A wide range of subjects is available, including two modern languages (German and French), the three separate sciences or dual- or single-award science, Latin and business studies at GCSE. Additional subjects - ICT, statistics, Italian and astronomy - are taught after the end of the school day for those pupils who want to study a tenth and sometimes up to even a twelfth GCSE subject. These opportunities are appreciated by the pupils and their parents. For those pupils who do not wish to study a purely academic curriculum, a work-related programme is available in Years 10 and 11 and this too is appreciated by pupils and their parents. Personal and social education is in transition as heads of year take responsibility for the programme, taught in tutor time and a weekly lesson. Planning is good overall, with an appropriate range of topics covered, but the provision in tutor time is not always effectively organised.
19. A very good range of clubs and activities is provided, and pupils are encouraged to become involved. About 300 pupils follow a programme that will enable them to achieve the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver Awards. Homework clubs, which take place in the high quality resources centre and learning support unit, enable pupils to use the college's internet facilities out of school hours. Revision sessions are provided for GCSE candidates during lunchtimes and at the end of the school day. Several sports teams are coached in a wide range of areas, including both girls' and boys' football, and school teams are successful in inter-college competitions. Many pupils are learning to play instruments – about one in every ten at the college. Orchestras and other music groups enable pupils to enjoy their music making. A major college musical takes place every year in which large numbers of staff and pupils become involved in all aspects of the production. The most recent and very successful production was 'Les Miserables' in 2003.
20. Curriculum links with the community are very strong, as they are with the main feeder primary schools, and colleges and schools the pupils transfer to at the age of sixteen. The community education department and business training centre based in the college, both of which are used by the community during the day and out of school hours, provide excellent opportunities for college-community curriculum links. The college has been a prime mover in establishing a community charity – the 'ARC' or 'area resources centre'. This charity is in the process of buying a shop in the centre of the town. Some lessons will take place at the shop and it will be used as a 'drop-in' centre to help bring the college and town community even closer together. Advice and information will be provided for many groups in the community, for example, help and guidance for young mothers. A Citizens' Advice Bureau will also be located there. This excellent innovation could be of great value to those parents who do not enjoy coming into any school or college.
21. The extended school day, running on to about 5 pm for many involved with additional subjects and clubs, is of great benefit to the pupils. Some time is lost during the working day, however, because there is no break between lessons and it takes pupils several minutes to move between rooms on the extensive site.

Very good behaviour and pupil attitudes to learning

22. Pupils' conduct is excellent around the college at breaktime, lunch time, and before and after school. The all-pervasive and supportive school ethos, with clear guidance and expectations, is appreciated by pupils and staff alike and they respond very well to it. Heads of year and senior managers are often seen around the college and staff know they have colleagues they can turn to if help is needed. Pupils in turn are aware of this staff presence and know it is there to ensure that the college has a very pleasant learning environment. In most lessons, pupils' behaviour is very good. Older pupils refer to how they have learnt to appreciate what is provided. In one or two lessons, a few pupils' conduct was rather silly at times, usually in lower attaining sets.
23. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good overall. As pupils enter the college they are enthusiastic and pleased to have a place at Soham. As they progress from year to year their increasing maturity shows and by the time they are in Year 11, their learning skills and approach are excellent. These positive

attitudes stem from pupils' appreciation of the quality of teaching, the extra activities made available, and the way staff support them. Expectations are high in all areas of school life and pupils know this. A Year 11 French lesson exemplifies these high expectations and the pupils' excellent response. The lesson was very well planned and presented and pupils responded with total commitment. They listened intently, intelligently questioned points they did not follow and enjoyed the challenging work. Written work was completed with great care. The pupils knew that the teacher wanted them to succeed in their GCSE examinations and was doing everything possible to try to help, and they made maximum use of this support.

Outstanding leadership and careful, rigorous and far-sighted management, with a strong emphasis on improving pupils' learning and achievement

24. Soham is a college where learning really matters, and personal endeavour and achievement have the highest priority. All staff work hard to implement the college aims. The example set by the principal, supported by his governors and senior staff, is a key element in the college's success. He is highly respected by the school community and provides a strong, clear lead for others to follow. Good humour, clear thinking and respect for the individual characterise his approach. Current work on improving teaching and learning, which has the backing and involvement of all members of the senior management team, is having a very good impact on provision for the pupils.
25. Senior managers have clear and appropriate roles. The system of having one senior manager with responsibility for Key Stage 3 and one for Key Stage 4 has brought the pastoral and academic dimensions of school life together very well. Tasks are delegated very effectively, with a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluating progress. The outcome of this is seen in the very good progress made in the areas for development identified in the last inspection report. Members of the senior team take corporate responsibility for all that takes place and provide one another with very good support.
26. Heads of year and of department see themselves as effective 'middle managers', which they are. They are key practitioners in bringing about change. They do not compete with one another, but co-operate and support each other. The school has a substantial range of data which is analysed in detail and this is used by middle management to inform the actions they take to improve pupils' achievements.
27. Faculty reviews, involving both senior and middle managers, result in very detailed and thorough reports, indicating strengths and weaknesses in each subject taught. Lesson observation and work and mark scrutiny, with associated data analysis, provide very good evidence for these reviews. These substantial, if somewhat lengthy, documents show where strengths are and which aspects could improve further. Department and year heads are self-critical; they follow through points and observe teaching and learning throughout the year. There are differences in approach and frequency, however, and a more consistent approach would be helpful.
28. Communication throughout the college is very effective and successful. In addition to a full range of briefings and meetings, e-mail is used to ensure that all concerned receive important messages.
29. Governors are aware how successful the college is, and the role of the principal in developing the college's position as a focal point in the community, particularly over the past year. They are reflective and knowledgeable, and bring a great range of expertise from which both staff and pupils benefit.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

No significant issues were identified for improvement.

30. In a small minority of lessons, however, teaching was not as effective as it should be.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. The governors, principal and staff may wish to include, in their development planning, measures to improve the quality of teaching in a small minority of lessons where some pupils make barely satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress. Particular points to focus upon are: the appropriateness of work for some pupils in lower attaining sets; responding to development points in pupils' individual education plans; and sharing existing good practice in managing pupils' behaviour.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	50*
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	23

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	17	17	10	2	0	0
Percentage	6	35	35	20	4	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents about two percentage points.

(the quality of teaching and learning was not graded in one lesson observed)*

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1314
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	70

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	30
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	241

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.2

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	143	129	272

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	114	112	122
	Girls	115	103	107
	Total	229	215	229
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (72)	79 (88)	84 (85)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (41)	54 (65)	44 (48)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	94	117	100
	Girls	101	112	91
	Total	195	229	229
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (82)	86 (88)	72 (81)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils At NC level 6 or above	School	35 (41)	52 (69)	40 (50)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

	Year
	Boys
	Girls
	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	
	2002
	137
	106
	243

GCSE results

5 or more grades A* to C

5 or more grades A*-G

1 or more grades A*-G

	Boys
	86
	135
	136
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	
	Girls
	83
	103
	106
	Total
	169
	238
	242

Percentage of pupils achieving

School
70 (69)
98 (93)
100 (98)

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1241	18	1
3		
11	3	
2		
1		
4		
9		
4		
0		
0		
2		
0		
1		
0		
3		
2		
31	2	

The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	70
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.8:1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	33
Total aggregate hours worked per week	797

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.9
Key Stage 4	22.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	3,520,786
Total expenditure	3,464,185
Expenditure per pupil	2,657
Balance brought forward from previous year	166,797
Balance carried forward to next year	223,398

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	6
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1314
Number of questionnaires returned	273

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	54	10	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	52	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	60	4	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	54	18	6	3
The teaching is good.	31	63	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	52	18	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	44	3	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	36	2	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	26	50	18	4	2
The school is well led and managed.	41	50	4	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	56	4	1	2

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

31	52	8	1	9
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Other issues raised by parents

Parents are very satisfied with the education provided, and they hold the view that the college is at the centre of the local community. A few commented on the unpleasant quality of the pupils' WCs, and parents' evenings that were not as well organised as they could be.