



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Thomas Peacocke Community College

East Sussex Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 13-14 May 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Thomas Peacocke Community College
Type of school:	Secondary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Headteacher:	Mrs A Cockerham
Address of school:	The Grove Rye East Sussex TN31 7NQ
Telephone:	01797 222 545
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Miss E Baldwin
Local education authority area:	East Sussex
Unique reference number:	114596
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs L Soden HMI
Dates of inspection:	13-14 May 2004

Introduction

1. Thomas Peacocke Community College is a mixed school situated in Rye, East Sussex. It is designated for pupils aged 11 to 18 years but there is no longer any post-16 provision. Nearly all its 602 pupils are of white British heritage. Three pupils have English as an additional language. The college draws its pupils from the immediate area as well as from the neighbouring county of Kent. The pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The uptake of free school meals is broadly average. Twenty three per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, which is above the national average. The number of pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Need is also above the national average. The pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the college are below the expected levels overall; however, the full ability range is represented in the college.

2. The school was inspected in January 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of January 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on six occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In May 2004 three HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2002.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- standards are improving throughout the college but they remain below average overall. The results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2003 improved in all three subjects but remained below the national average;
- in the GCSE examinations in 2003, the proportion of the pupils obtaining five or more grades at A* to C was below the national average but broadly in line with results for schools in similar contexts. Many of the pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment but there is some underachievement, particularly at Key Stage 4;
- standards in information and communication technology (ICT), for most pupils, are below the expected level;
- the progress that the pupils make in their learning is accelerating as the quality and consistency of the teaching improve. However, progress in a small proportion of the lessons is limited because the activities are not appropriately matched to the pupils' individual needs;

- the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in 29 of the 31 lessons, including 21 in which they were good or very good. This reflects the generally positive climate which has been developed and maintained. The pupils' attitudes have improved significantly in response to the teachers' higher expectations;
- attendance is satisfactory and continuing to improve. The rate of attendance is just above the national average. Despite the school's effective procedures, the rate of unauthorised absence remains slightly above the national average;
- the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The curriculum includes a range of opportunities to promote the pupils' personal development and additional activities in the arts and physical education (PE) enrich the pupils' experience. The tutor and house systems contribute to making the college a socially cohesive community. Assemblies encourage hard work and celebrate the pupils' achievements;
- the quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly and is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in 29 out of 31 lessons and good, or very good, in almost half. The impact of the college-wide approach to improving the pupils' skills in speaking and listening is beginning to be evident in the growing ability of pupils, at all levels of attainment, to offer thoughtful and sophisticated responses to the teachers' increasingly effective use of questioning;
- the use of assessment is improving. The college has a detailed range of performance data, to which all staff have access. A range of data is used to track the pupils' progress and to set suitably challenging targets. However, the use of day-to-day assessment to inform the teachers' planning is not yet consistent;
- the quality of the curriculum is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. There are sound plans to address the current weaknesses in timetabling, enabling all the subjects to be taught by specialists. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is being effectively developed to provide increased flexibility for the pupils. The provision for vocational education has been improved, extending the opportunities and support for the most vulnerable pupils;
- the support for the pupils who have special educational needs is good when they are in lessons with teaching assistants. However, provision is unsatisfactory when the pupils are withdrawn from classes for additional teaching and when they are timetabled to work independently;
- the leadership and management of the principal are very good; her thoughtful and determined approach has effectively consolidated the transformational regime established by the acting principal. The principal has rapidly gained the confidence of the whole school community. The staff are optimistic about the future and becoming increasingly involved in the principal's ambitions for the college's success;

- a cornerstone of the college's improvement has been the extensive and regular monitoring of lessons carried out by the senior managers. This consistent approach has ensured that the senior managers have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the college;
- the principal is well supported by the leadership team; however, the quality of the middle managers is variable, with some recently appointed staff needing further development and support; the new heads of house are working well as a team; identifying common issues and resolving problems more consistently and rapidly;
- the college has become more outward looking. It is beginning to consider and plan for longer-term developments. The very effective practice in the English department has led to the college's inclusion in the pilot of a new element of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, which is focusing on English and ICT;
- the governors have made a valuable contribution to the college's progress. The chair of governors has ensured that communication is efficient and that the governors are well informed about developments, enabling the governing body to become increasingly effective in holding the college to account for its performance;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided the school with effective support and challenge. The programme of intervention has been reviewed, ensuring that the support has met the school's changing needs. The LEA rightly intends to continue to provide support for the school from its advisers and consultants.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- raise the quality of all the teaching to the level of the most successful;
- develop the use of assessment to ensure that lesson-planning consistently takes account of the pupils' identified learning needs;
- improve the provision for the pupils who have special educational needs;
- provide appropriate opportunities for the pupils to develop skills in the use and application of ICT.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. On entry to the college, the pupils' standards of achievement are below average overall. The results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2003 improved in all

three subjects but remained below the national average. The proportion of the pupils achieving the expected level for their age was 32 per cent in English, 34 per cent in mathematics and 32 per cent in science. The proportion of the pupils gaining the higher levels also rose in all three subjects. The value-added indicators show that many pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment and make reasonable progress at Key Stage 3.

8. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the results fell from the levels achieved in 2002. The proportion of pupils obtaining five or more grades at A* to C was 37 per cent, which is below the national average but broadly in line with results for schools in similar contexts. The proportion of the pupils gaining five or more A* to G grades and one or more A* to G grades was 77.6 per cent and 87.7 per cent respectively. However, results in English improved, with significant gains being made at the higher grades.

9. In English, standards are beginning to rise across all the year groups. However, standards in literacy remain too varied across the college. The pupils' presentation of their work can be untidy, compromising the accuracy of their writing. Pupils, at all levels of prior attainment, make basic errors, such as the lack of full stops and capital letters, which they fail to correct for themselves. The correction of the pupils' writing is not yet consistent enough across all the subjects. The pupils are acquiring an appropriate technical vocabulary, which is contributing to higher standards. For example, in art the pupils are able to use a sophisticated subject-specific terms to discuss the quality of their work and to respond to the work of artists.

10. In mathematics, the standards vary widely but are below the age-related expectations overall. The most able pupils have a sound recall of basic number facts and apply their knowledge to solve problems. However, many pupils do not calculate with consistent accuracy. Their understanding of algebra is weak. The work in the pupils' books, particularly that of the boys in Key Stage 4, is often poorly presented, showing the weak use of mathematical expressions and language, and poorly drawn graphs. Too few of the pupils are confident of their mathematical knowledge and this restricts their ability to identify patterns in numbers or to tackle numerical problems that they meet in other subjects.

11. Standards in science are rising, but from a low base and remain below the expected levels overall. Some pupils have a good understanding of life processes and physical processes, but too high a proportion of the pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The pupils are able to explain concepts and processes adequately, but their use of scientific terms is underdeveloped. Many of the pupils struggle to interpret data from graphs and tables.

12. The work of most pupils in ICT lessons is well below the expected levels for their ages. Many pupils have not received well-structured provision for building their skills and understanding in ICT. As a result, too many pupils do not have the knowledge to use ICT confidently to extend their learning. There are limited opportunities for those pupils capable of achieving the higher levels of attainment to develop advanced ICT skills.

13. The progress that the pupils make in their learning is accelerating as the quality and consistency of the teaching improves. However, progress in a small proportion of the lessons is limited because the activities are not appropriately matched to the pupils' individual needs. Despite considerable improvements in planning, assessment information is not used

consistently enough to inform lesson objectives and to ensure the precise differentiation of work to meet the pupils' needs.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in 29 of the 31 lessons, including 21 in which they were good or very good. This reflects the generally positive climate which has been developed and maintained. The pupils' attitudes have improved significantly in response to the teachers' higher expectations. Around the college, the pupils behave well; they are courteous and keen to engage in positive conversations about their school. The pupils appreciate that the staff are genuinely concerned about them, and they want to learn. The staff are actively seeking the views of the pupils, and the older pupils are beginning to consider themselves partners in the development of their school. Good relationships between the staff and the pupils are complemented by sound systems and structures, which are helping the pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own conduct. Behavioural difficulties are recognised quickly and addressed positively. As a result, the numbers of incidents of bad behaviour and exclusions continue to reduce. However, the arrangements for pupils who have been excluded from individual subjects are unsatisfactory.

15. A suitable policy for behaviour has been agreed by the governors and guides the college's work. The policy is underpinned by agreed expectations, which are prominently displayed in circulation areas and on classroom walls. There are helpful guidelines for staff on how to support pupils who have difficulties, manage challenging behaviour and reward good attitudes and conduct, and a set of simple classroom rules for the pupils. The policy is linked appropriately to the home college agreement. A reward system is used effectively to promote good effort and behaviour. The policy has been usefully adapted to include pastoral support plans for vulnerable pupils. These pupils are expected to be responsible for their own plans and teachers are encouraged to review their progress at the end of each lesson. This immediate feedback has increased the pupils' motivation.

16. The house system has been successfully established, and the benefits of the mixed-age tutor groups are being recognised, for example, through the older pupils supporting the younger members of the group. The number of recorded incidents of bullying has reduced significantly and social events, organised on a house basis, have been particularly successful.

17. The increasing provision of a work-related curriculum has improved on the older pupils' attitudes to their work; individually organised programmes have successfully motivated those pupils at most risk of disaffection and exclusion.

18. The rate of attendance is much improved and is slightly above the national average. Despite the school's effective procedures and prompt responses to absence, the rate of unauthorised absence remains slightly above the national average. The pupils' punctuality in the mornings has improved significantly and the majority arrive at their lessons on time.

19. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The vast majority of the staff provide good adult role models for the pupils, demonstrating the behaviour which they expect. The curriculum includes a range of relevant topics for study, and additional activities in the arts and PE enrich the pupils' experience. The tutor and house systems contribute to making the college a socially cohesive community.

The pupils are becoming more enterprising and are consistently encouraged to participate in projects which benefit others.

20. The college is working hard to improve the relationship with its community, recognising the importance of establishing the college as a centre for learning in the town. As a result of this approach, there have been growing opportunities for the pupils; for example, a number of pupils have spent time at the police station as part of a new programme aimed at preventing disaffection and exclusion.

21. The college meets the requirements for collective worship. Assemblies promote hard work and celebrate the pupils' achievements. There is a good range of external speakers, including representatives from the local churches who make a valuable contribution to the pupils' spiritual development.

22. The college presents a pleasant and welcoming professional environment. The pupils' achievements are celebrated through the provision of high-quality displays. The artwork around the college is of a very high standard. The college site is free from litter.

The quality of education

23. The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly and is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in 29 out of 31 lessons and good, or very good, in almost half. The impact of the college-wide approach to improving the pupils' skills in speaking and listening is beginning to be evident in the growing ability of the pupils, at all levels of attainment, to offer thoughtful and sophisticated responses to the teachers' increasingly effective use of questioning.

24. Lesson-planning has improved significantly; a consistent format is successfully used across the college, which has helped to raise the quality of teaching. Learning objectives are routinely shared with the pupils and rarely confused with activities. These improvements have been underpinned by the development of a handbook for teaching and learning, which has promoted consistency and raised the teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve. A well-structured programme of training and development has focused on the delivery of the three-part lesson and introduced a range of further strategies for providing the pupils with an appropriate level of challenge. The pace and variety of activities have been emphasised. The impact of this work is evident in the growing amount of good and very good teaching.

25. The most effective teaching captured the pupils' attention because of the enthusiasm and good subject knowledge of the teachers. Lessons started crisply with well-managed starter activities, which engaged the class, were appropriately timed and were related to previous learning. The teachers used questioning to challenge the pupils and to differentiate the work. The teachers had ambitious aims for the pupils, which were often exemplified by modelling what the pupils were expected to achieve. This good practice enabled the pupils to envisage the outcome of their work and raised aspirations. The pupils were absorbed by reading their English teacher's writing or seeing their art teacher's drawing. The management of behaviour was unobtrusive, but the pupils understood the teachers' expectations of their conduct. Relationships between the teachers and the pupils were positive and productive, enabling the teachers to encourage the pupils, but also to offer them an honest and accurate assessment of the quality of their work. The most helpful practice related the pupils' work to assessment criteria, showing them the next steps in their learning.

26. In the least effective lessons, the pace of learning was poorly gauged, with either too much or too little activity. The pupils made limited progress because the planned activities did not match their levels of prior attainment. The teaching was weakly organised and there was a lack of clarity about what the pupils were expected to achieve or how they would learn. Too much of the lesson was dominated by the teacher, resulting in too few opportunities for the pupils to become actively engaged in their learning.

27. Even in otherwise satisfactory lessons, concluding plenary sessions were underused. They were often perfunctory or rushed and were not routinely employed to review or to consolidate learning, or to provide the teachers with the assessment information that might feed into their planning for the next lesson.

28. The use of assessment is improving. The college has a detailed range of performance data, to which all staff have access. A range of data is used to track the pupils' progress and to set suitably challenging targets. However, the day-to-day use of assessment to inform the teachers' planning is not yet consistent.

29. A comprehensive information system has been created, recording subject-specific assessment grades as well as targets for improvement. The grades are usefully colour-coded and provide clear information on the pupils' progress. An important improvement has been made in providing house group tutors and heads of house with this data, involving them in monitoring and tracking the pupils' progress. Target-setting for the pupils has been helpfully underpinned by the availability of annotated portfolios of the pupils' work. These are used to demonstrate agreed standards, and as reference materials to promote the accuracy and the consistency of marking. The staff have been trained in marking for literacy and a folder of exemplary marking has been produced. The English department has provided valuable support for this development but practice across the school remains variable.

30. The creation of an assessment for learning development group has been a positive response to the assessment strand of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. This group is developing the pupils' involvement in assessment and target-setting, through peer and self-assessment. Feedback from the pupils will be used to inform the teachers' planning. This is a promising approach and a good example of the college's commitment to promoting the pupils' independence.

31. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. There are sound plans to address the current weaknesses in timetabling, enabling all the subjects to be taught by specialists. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is being developed to provide increased flexibility for the pupils. The provision for vocational education has been improved, extending the opportunities and support for the most vulnerable pupils.

32. The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is good when the pupils are supported by teaching assistants in lessons. However, provision is unsatisfactory when the pupils are withdrawn from classes for additional teaching and when they are timetabled to work independently in the special needs base. The teaching assistants for special education needs are committed and enterprising but, due to staff absence, the department has been without expert leadership and management for a considerable time, and provision has become less effective. Individual education plans omit significant areas of need and are not reviewed frequently enough. The pupils' learning targets are not specific; consequently individual and small group teaching is insufficiently related to need. Although

planning for the pupils is detailed, it fails to identify learning objectives, making it difficult to judge and record the pupils' progress. The school uses the special educational needs base to accommodate those pupils who are excluded from individual lessons. These pupils benefit from the supportive approach of the teaching assistants, but the quality of their learning is unsatisfactory. The provision for special educational needs overlaps with that for the pupils with behavioural difficulties, making it difficult to identify clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

Leadership and management

33. The leadership and management of the principal are very good; her thoughtful and determined approach has effectively consolidated the transformational regime implemented by the acting principal. The principal has rapidly gained the confidence of the whole college community. She inspires loyalty from her staff and she has created a strong team spirit and good morale. The staff are optimistic about the future and becoming increasingly involved in the principal's ambitions for the college's success. The capacity of the college to realise these ambitions is good.

34. A cornerstone of the college's improvement has been the extensive and regular monitoring of lessons. This consistent approach has ensured that the senior managers have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the college. The regular presence of the senior staff in lessons has clearly conveyed the message that what goes on in classrooms is of prime importance. The information from monitoring activities has been used effectively to inform the programme for professional development.

35. The principal is well supported by the leadership team, which was appropriately reorganised to take into account the new structures in the college. Clear lines of accountability and responsibility have been established. However, the fall in pupil numbers has had an impact on the college's budget and there are plans to reduce the leadership team. The principal and the governors have rightly ensured that the restructuring process is properly transparent and that the outcomes will not compromise the college's capacity for improvement.

36. The new heads of house are working well as a team, identifying common issues and resolving problems more consistently and rapidly. Relationships with external agencies have been rationalised by the operation of this team, which is improving provision for the pupils. However, the quality of the middle managers overall is variable, with some recently appointed staff needing further development and support.

37. The governors have made a valuable contribution to the college's progress. The chair of governors has ensured that communication is efficient and that the governors are well informed about developments, enabling the governing body to become increasingly successful in holding the college to account for its performance.

38. The LEA has provided the school with effective support and challenge. Middle managers have particularly valued the work of the subject consultants and the support for the implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. The LEA has consistently reviewed its programme of intervention, ensuring that the support has met the school's changing needs. The LEA rightly intends to continue to provide support for the school from its advisers and consultants.

Implementation of the action plan

39. The inspection report of 2002 required the college to address five key issues. These related to: improving the quality of teaching and learning; improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; improving the use of assessment data; improving leadership and management; and improving the sixth form. For the first year of special measures, the college's progress was erratic and limited overall.

40. An acting principal was appointed in April 2002 and swiftly took robust action to tackle unsatisfactory behaviour and weaknesses in teaching. This was balanced with an effective programme of support and development. The pupils' behaviour and attitudes improved as a result of better teaching and the consistency in managing behaviour. Good progress was made in these areas. The substantive principal consolidated these gains following her appointment in January 2004, significantly improving the quality of leadership and management. Monitoring and evaluation are effective and the quality of middle management is improving. Assessment information is used more effectively. Overall, good progress has been made. There is no longer any sixth-form provision at the college.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspection Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in January 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in June and November 2002, in March, June and November 2003, and in February 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2002.

In May 2004, three HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Thirty one lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the principal, senior staff and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.