



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Coleridge Community College

Cambridgeshire Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 6 and 7 December 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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Contents

Section	Page
Basic information about the school	iv
Introduction	1
Main findings	1
Key issues	3
Inspection findings	3
Standards achieved by the pupils	3
The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	5
The quality of education	6
Leadership and management	7
Implementation of the action plan	8
Appendix – Information about the inspection	9

Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Coleridge Community College
Type of school:	Comprehensive
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Principal:	Mr C Meddle
Address of school:	Radegund Road Cambridge CB1 3RJ
Telephone:	01223 712300
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body at the above address
Chair of governors:	Mrs S Roach
Local education authority area:	Cambridgeshire
Unique reference number:	110866
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr M E Madden, Additional Inspector
Dates of inspection:	6 and 7 December 2004

Introduction

1. Coleridge Community College is a small secondary school in Cambridge. Its 348 pupils come from families living in a variety of socio-economic circumstances. Many of them are affected by educational disadvantage arising from, for example, low household income and high family mobility. About one pupil in six speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion identified as having special educational needs. The overall attainment of the pupils on entry to the school is well below average.

2. The school was inspected in January 2003. 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 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In December 2004, two HMI and one Additional Inspector 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 2003.

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 rising as a result of recent changes in the school. Overall, standards remain below what is typical of comprehensive schools nationally, but the pupils' progress in English and mathematics through Key Stage 3 is sound and the school met its target for the proportion of passes at grades A* to C in the most recent GCSE examinations;
 - there is, nevertheless, significant underachievement. Standards in science are unsatisfactory and too few of the pupils achieve the highest standards in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations in this subject;
 - the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in almost nine tenths of the lessons, including half of them in which it was good;
 - the pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory. They were often keen to learn. However, too many of them lacked confidence in their ability to work independently and tended to contribute only when the teacher required them to do so;
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- the pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. The pupils usually treated each other and their environment with care and respect. The use of exclusion is appropriately measured. There have been no recent permanent exclusions;
- the rate of attendance has increased since the last inspection. It remains below the average for secondary schools but is broadly satisfactory. In the main, pupils are punctual in their arrival at school and in their movement from lesson to lesson;
- the pupils' social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Most of the pupils are appropriately sensitive and show respect for others. There is, however, scope for further extension of the pupils' spiritual development; too little is done to raise their awareness of the spiritual dimension of human experience;
- the school makes satisfactory provision for the pupils' personal development through formal programmes and the day-to-day work of the teachers in highlighting moral and social issues, monitoring the pupils' behaviour and attendance, encouraging participation and fostering sensitivity towards others;
- the quality of teaching was satisfactory overall. Good teaching was observed in a wide variety of subjects. There is still scope, however, for improvements including making it more effective in science, reducing the amount that is unsatisfactory teaching and increasing the proportion that is of good quality;
- the school's curriculum is broad and reasonably balanced. Overall, it is satisfactory and at Key Stage 4 it offers a sound range of alternative pathways to foster the pupils' interest and meet their needs for academic courses, work-related learning or further attention to basic skills;
- the school has good arrangements for assessment. Information is distributed efficiently to teachers and used well to group pupils for teaching, guide lesson-planning, and monitor the pupils' attainment and progress. Most of the teachers mark the pupils' work regularly but their comments are not always focused sufficiently on the intended learning;
- the school makes good provision for pupils who have special educational needs. These pupils make sound and in many cases good progress;
- leadership and management are broadly satisfactory. The principal has attended steadily to controlling a budget deficit, improving the learning environment and strengthening the staff, including its management team;
- the principal is supported by a stable staff. Senior staff have established more effective classroom practices and drafted a further school improvement plan. Communication is good and the morale of the staff is sound. The staff has the capacity to continue improving the school;

- however, the school's staffing costs are high and it has a large budget deficit which is exacerbated by a fall in the number of pupils;
- the school's high unit cost is justified for the time being by the rapid rate of recent improvement. However, the school does not have a sustainable financial strategy. The governing body is a strong advocate for the school but is also well aware that it has to reduce its costs;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided effective support for recent improvements in the quality of education. It has more recently joined governors and senior staff in recognising that the school cannot continue in its present form;
- a period of consultation has opened the way appropriately for fresh opportunities for sustainable improvement, such as formal federation with a nearby school.

Key issues

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

- raise the attainment of the pupils;
- improve the quality of teaching;
- continue to build the confidence and positive attitudes of the pupils;
- co-operate with the LEA to create viable long-term arrangements for the pupils' education.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards are rising. The pupils' attainment in National Curriculum tests in 2004 was significantly above that of 2003. Overall, the school's results remain below the average for schools nationally, but the proportions of pupils who achieved the target Level 5 in mathematics and English were broadly comparable with those from schools in similar socio-economic contexts. Analyses of information used to track the pupils' attainment show that many, with the exception of the most capable, of the pupils make sound progress through Key Stage 3 in English and in mathematics.

8. In the GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, 30 per cent of the pupils achieved five or more grades A* to C and the school met its targets. The proportion of pupils who achieved these higher grades in English was, at 51 per cent, considerably greater than in 2003. High GCSE grades were also achieved by pupils in some other subjects including English literature and art.

9. There is, nevertheless, significant underachievement. Standards in science are very low and are unsatisfactory. The results in 2004 from National Curriculum tests in the core subjects showed that the proportions of the pupils that exceeded the target level were relatively small. In the GCSE examinations, too few of the pupils achieved the higher grades.

10. Standards observed in English lessons ranged from above to below what is expected for the pupils' ages and were broadly satisfactory. The pupils have well developed listening skills; many of them listened carefully to one another and to their teachers and responded thoughtfully. The pupils also expressed themselves clearly when speaking. Their statements tended, however, to be simply constructed using a limited range of vocabulary.

11. Most of the pupils read accurately, however, the less capable pupils lacked fluency when they read aloud. Many of the pupils understood how media texts were constructed and used appropriate ideas and technical vocabulary confidently when analysing them. The best written work was well paragraphed, employed an appropriate range of vocabulary and used simple and complex sentences appropriately. However, there were weaknesses in spelling and punctuation in the work of a significant number of pupils.

12. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is below that expected for pupils of similar age. Their progress in mathematics is, however, sound. The pupils' understanding of number and mathematical relationships is developing well in all year groups. In Year 9, for example, pupils had an appropriate understanding of the relationships between angles in geometric shapes and between the terms in extended sequences of numbers. The pupils' numeracy is helped further through a variety of applications in their lessons across the curriculum, most notably in design and technology, geography, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education.

13. Many of the pupils in Key Stage 4 have a secure basis for their GCSE study of mathematics. Some made systematic use of a range of mathematical concepts and skills in conducting investigations and explaining their results. The coursework of pupils in Year 11 suggests that their GCSE results in mathematics will be significantly higher in 2005 than those in 2004.

14. Standards in science are low. In Key Stage 3, the pupils learn about an appropriate range of topics such as the characteristics and behaviour of materials, the structure and functioning of plants and the nature and effects of forces and energy. Their recording of observations is sound and some were able to use appropriate knowledge of scientific ideas to explain phenomena that they had explored, for example in describing the passing of energy through food chains in simple ecosystems. Relatively few, however, were able to exemplify or express these ideas and relationships with the expected fluency.

15. In Key Stage 4, all of the pupils study science further, many of them on courses leading to a double GCSE award. Pupils' capacity for scientific investigation grew further, for example, in a lesson about the relationships between voltage, current, resistance and temperature in simple electrical circuits. Their overall scientific attainment is rising as a result of fresh approaches to curriculum planning and teaching. It is, nevertheless, unduly restricted by weak skills and by gaps in their knowledge.

16. The quality of learning was satisfactory or better in almost nine tenths of the lessons, including half of them in which it was good. In the better lessons, the pupils' progress was rapid, broadly based across a range of learning objectives, well grounded in their previous knowledge and directed towards their greater understanding of important ideas. For example, a brisk and stimulating music lesson led pupils in Year 8 to consolidate their recent learning through rigorous application of specialist terms, consideration of historical context, thoughtful practice and critical appraisal of competent group performances.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory. They were at least satisfactory in almost nine tenths of the lessons and many of the pupils responded particularly well to good teaching. In the main, the pupils listened attentively, contributed to discussions, participated responsibly in lessons and reflected purposefully on their work.

18. There were good relationships in many classes, both between pupils and between the pupils and the teacher. The pupils were often keen to learn, but many of them lacked confidence in their ability to work independently and tended to contribute only when the teacher required them to do so. The pupils' attitudes were unsatisfactory in three lessons. Where the teaching was insecure, the pupils' attention wandered and in some instances their behaviour deteriorated.

19. The school pays effective attention to improving the pupils' attendance. It has invested in an electronic registration system and routinely contacts parents on the first day of any unexplained absence. Frequent meetings between relevant school staff and educational welfare officers focus on individual pupils whose attendance causes concern.

20. The rate of attendance has increased since the inspection in January 2003 and is broadly satisfactory. It remains, at a little over 90 per cent, below the average for secondary schools. The rate of unauthorised absence is a little high at more than one per cent. In the main, the pupils arrive punctually at school and move quickly from lesson to lesson. A small number of pupils, however, was sometimes late for lessons.

21. The pupils' social and moral development are satisfactory. Almost all of the pupils distinguish between right and wrong. The pupils' behaviour around the school was satisfactory. Although there were occasional boisterous incidents, the pupils usually treated each other and their environment with care and respect. Some were courteous and helpful in their approach to others, including visitors.

22. The pupils' behaviour is monitored closely by the staff. The school has effective arrangements, including the appropriate use of rewards and sanctions, for encouraging good behaviour and dealing with misconduct. Significant use is made of exclusion, but this is appropriately measured. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced. There have been no recent permanent exclusions.

23. The school's provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Too little is done, however, to raise the pupils' awareness of the spiritual dimension of human experience. Most of the pupils demonstrated sensitivity and showed appropriate respect for distinctive groups within the school. At times, some of the pupils

revealed a deeper interest in matters that stretched their imaginations; for example, when interpreting photographic images from Antarctica. There is, however, scope for further promotion of the pupils' spiritual development.

24. The school makes satisfactory provision for the pupils' personal development through the work of form tutors and year teams, extracurricular activities, assemblies and lessons in personal, social and health education, and the day-to-day work of the teachers. Tutors routinely follow up matters of attendance, behaviour and punctuality. Form groups give the pupils opportunities to support one another and to collaborate in competitions and participate in the School Council. Work in a variety of subjects contributed well to raising the pupils' awareness of the circumstances and traditions of different cultural groups.

25. An assembly used the approaching Christmas season to highlight elements of Christian belief and practice. However, the sense of occasion was diminished and the impact reduced by deficiencies in planning and by a lack of time for reflection.

The quality of education

26. The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall. It was at least satisfactory in almost nine tenths of the lessons, including just over half of them in which it was good or better. Good and very good teaching was observed in many subjects including design and technology, drama, English, French, geography, ICT, mathematics and music.

27. The more effective lessons usually included activities that added interest and challenge. The teachers had a good subject knowledge which they often conveyed expertly, with enthusiasm, and with a clear focus on new learning and new vocabulary. Relationships within the class were good and a purposeful learning atmosphere and a brisk pace of work were secured. The teachers often used questions effectively to help the pupils build on their prior learning or to clarify their misunderstandings. Homework is set regularly by many of the teachers, often to continue or complete class work. Some was more effective in extending the pupils' learning because it included a distinctive and engaging task which met the differing needs of individuals or groups of pupils.

28. In the lessons where the teaching was unsatisfactory and in some where it was broadly satisfactory, weaknesses included a lack of clarity about the objectives for learning and insufficient attention to the pupils' levels of attainment, which led to a lack of suitable challenge. In consequence, their behaviour deteriorated.

29. The school provides a broad, reasonably balanced and satisfactory curriculum. It is good in Key Stage 4 and has a sound range of alternative pathways to foster the interests of different pupils in academic or work-related learning and to meet the needs of some for further work in the basic skills.

30. The school has good arrangements for assessment. It has an extensive and reliable database and distributes information efficiently to the teachers. The learning support department augments this information with assessments of pupils as they are admitted to the school. The range of information is used increasingly well to group pupils for teaching and to guide the planning of lessons. Good use is made of assessments to monitor the attainment and gauge the progress of different groups of pupils.

31. Most teachers mark the pupils' work regularly. Many provide brief written comments intended to assist the pupils' learning. Some of the advice is focused on the development of skills specific to the subject. Increasingly, this is linked to the objectives of lessons. However, too much of the marking focuses on the presentation of work with insufficient regard for other elements of the learning.

32. The school makes good provision for pupils who have special educational needs. It operates sound systems for assessing particular learning difficulties. Individual education plans provide helpful guidance for the staff as well as targets for the pupils. Experienced assistants provide specific support in classes and in the school's pleasant and well organised learning centre. Very good individual support is provided for some of the pupils in Key Stage 4. Individual education plans are reviewed in consultation with parents with reasonable frequency. The short-term progress of individual pupils is monitored with care so that support can be adjusted appropriately. The pupils who have special educational needs make sound and in many cases good progress.

Leadership and management

33. In the time the principal has led the school, he has worked on controlling a budget deficit and improving the learning environment through a period of refurbishment of the premises. The focus and impact of strategic management, however, was lessened initially by difficulties in recruiting teaching staff which led to a deterioration in the quality of education.

34. Since January 2003, the school has used additional funding to strengthen staffing and to build more effective management arrangements, with a view to securing acceptable standards.

35. There is a well established pattern of meetings for planning, decision-making and training. Communication is good and the morale of the staff is sound. Responsibilities are clearly delegated to heads of department and heads of year. Lines of accountability are clearly drawn and are operated through an annual programme of meetings between senior and middle managers. The staff has, in principle, the capacity to continue the improvement of the school.

36. A number of policies have recently received more intense and decisive attention, notably to clarify arrangements for the assessment of the pupils' attainment, the management of their behaviour and the planning and conduct of lessons. Staff training has been used well this term to convey new expectations. As a result, the school's improvement has accelerated markedly. Senior staff have drafted a fresh plan to continue improving the school.

37. Overall, leadership is satisfactory, as is the quality of management by senior and middle managers. However, despite controls on expenditure, an accumulated deficit of £308,000 was carried forward into the current financial year. A balanced annual budget has been set. This year's expenditure remains as predicted, but the school is unlikely to erode its deficit for a considerable time.

38. There has been a recent and substantial fall in the number of pupils on roll. The school does not attract sufficient pupils and the LEA predicts this to continue. In addition, the level of staffing is generous. The school's management structure is also costly for a

school of this size and the unit cost per pupil is high. This can be justified for the time being by the rapid rate of recent improvement, but the school does not have a sustainable financial strategy. Significant changes are required to prevent an increase in the budget deficit.

39. The governing body is a strong advocate for the school and shows a steady interest in its condition, its impact on the pupils and its improvement. The chair of governors is a frequent visitor. Occasional visits are made also by linked governors to explore their particular aspects of the school's work.

40. The LEA has provided effective support for recent improvements in the quality of education, including arranging collaborative work with other local schools. The LEA, governors and senior staff have recognised, however, that the school cannot continue in its present form. Consideration is being given to other ways of providing education for the pupils. A period of consultation has opened the way for fresh possibilities for more sustainable school improvement, such as through federation with a nearby school.

Implementation of the action plan

41. The governing body prepared an action plan as required by the report of January 2003. The plan addressed the issues identified in that report; namely, strengthening management and raising standards by improving the teaching, the use of assessment and the pupils' attendance. The action plan has been implemented. Its progress was slow for a protracted period. More recently, the senior managers' affirmation of new policies has led to suitable staff training and a rapid improvement in the quality of education.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in January 2003. 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 2003, and in March and July 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2003.

In December 2004, an Additional Inspector and two 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.

Twenty eight parts of lessons, one assembly and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of governors and the school's attached inspector 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 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.