



Inspection report

Thomas Bennett Community College

Unique Reference Number 126075
LEA West Sussex
Inspection number 272299
Inspection dates 10 - 11 November 2004
Reporting inspector Chris Constantine HMI

Inspection carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 10 under the same act.

Type of School	Secondary	School address	Ashdown Drive
School category	Community		Tilgate
Age range of students	11 - 19		Crawley
			West Sussex
			RH10 5AD
Gender of students	Mixed	Telephone number	01293 526255
Number on roll	1530	Fax number	01293 527704
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Reg Bates
Date of previous inspection	March 1999	Headteacher	Ms Yasmin Maskatiya

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 - 19	December 2004	272299

Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Thomas Bennett Community College and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an independent lay inspector.

Description of the college

Thomas Bennett Community College is a specialist sports college for students aged 11 to 19, to the south of Crawley. It has a broad range of extended services developed with partners such as the Health Authority, West Sussex Police Force, Social Services, and the Crawley Learning Inclusion Project. The college has 1530 students, of whom 175 are in the sixth form. About 80 per cent are from White British backgrounds and 10 per cent of Pakistani or Indian heritage. Very few speak English as an additional language. Most students come from the immediate localities, which have areas of social disadvantage. The number of students with a statement of special educational need is high. The standards achieved by students at the time they enter the college are low, and literacy is weak. After a period of reduction in the roll, and difficulties in recruiting staff, the college is now full in Years 7 and 8. After local reorganisation, it admitted its first students into Year 7 in September 2004. Currently the college is on two sites, a third of a mile apart, that are due to be demolished next summer, when it will move into a new building.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Overall effectiveness of the college

The college provides satisfactory education. It has been through a period of decline but is now emerging in good heart. Although standards are still low, students are starting to make progress at a satisfactory rate. They enjoy much of their learning and develop useful skills for their adult life. The college has an inclusive approach and works hard and successfully to support those students who are experiencing personal difficulties. The college considers that the quality of provision is good. Inspectors agree that the college's curriculum and support for welfare are strengths, but judge that teaching and guidance promote progress for the students less reliably and so are satisfactory. Leadership and management show clear vision, emphasise raising standards and an ability to challenge slow progress, and set demanding targets. Value for money is satisfactory.

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of the college's sixth form

Provision for the sixth form is satisfactory but is hampered by the small size of too many teaching groups. The college provides a broad range of courses at appropriate levels; the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. This year only 39 per cent of students in Year 11 moved through to Year 12. The overall pass rate at GCE A level is below the national average, but the trend is upwards. AS level results have been disappointing. The sixth form is soundly led and managed, with secure monitoring and tracking of students' progress. Good links with external agencies provide rich opportunities for the students' moral, social and cultural development. Sixth-form students are loyal ambassadors and are starting to play a more vital role in the life of the whole college, particularly with regard to the college's specialist sports status.

Grade: 3

Improvement since the last inspection

Standards fell during this period but have started to recover because the college has now begun to ensure the quality and consistency of what it provides. Nevertheless, much remains to be done, and the college needs to raise urgently the low attainment of its students. Initial progress on the previous key issues was patchy, but more recently there have been clear improvements in information and communication technology (ICT), attendance and in the quality of teaching.

Grade: 3

Capacity to improve

The head and deputies are challenging the whole college to bring about rapid improvement and they have the capacity to make the necessary changes. However, greater consistency is needed in ensuring that the college's actions are having the required effect on students' progress. The college's self analysis is broadly accurate. It recognises, in part, the urgency of raising standards. However, this evaluation does not place quite enough weight on the low attainment of many students, and overestimates the progress already achieved.

Grade: 3

What the college should do to improve further

The college needs to:

- ensure consistently effective teaching
- improve students' learning and rates of progress
- raise standards and results throughout the college.

Achievement and standards

Results are well below average but most students make adequate progress. When students enter in Year 7 their standards are low and their skills in reading and writing are particularly weak. Students' progress in Key Stage 3 is improving as a result of increasingly reliable teaching. Results in 2004 show this trend to be continuing. In 2004, at the end of Key Stage 4, only one in five students achieved five or more higher grades. The college has recently energetically instituted a series of measures to raise standards in these years, with a concerted effort to reduce the proportion of students, particularly girls, who under-perform in Year 11. The main positive effects so far of these steps can be seen in better individual results in national examinations, and in the reduction in the proportion of students who gain no GCSE qualification.

In the sixth form, A-level results have improved markedly both in terms of the number of passes, as well as the proportion with higher grades. These results are still well below national expectations, but represent satisfactory progress in most subjects.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

Students' moral and social development is satisfactory. Younger students are very positive about the college, enjoy their lessons and feel that they are well cared for. They benefit from cross-curricular work, for example in citizenship and health matters. Those in Years 10 and 11 are less enthusiastic. Although occasional indiscipline and intimidation were seen between sites and in lessons, nearly all students are respectful and friendly; tolerance, respect and understanding are widespread; and there is no tension evident between racial groups. Students' cultural and racial backgrounds are valued. Their cultural development is good and their spiritual development adequate. Attendance has steadily improved but punctuality remains a problem. Healthy living is strongly promoted, especially through sports and with particular groups of students, such as girls and students with challenging behaviour, but not through healthy eating in the canteens. Students make a good contribution to the community through many extra-curricular and recreational opportunities, developed as result of the sports college status. Participation is high and work experience, work-related learning for all, and an alternative curriculum for some are strong features. However, the low number of students undertaking advanced level studies does not equip students well to meet their long-term economic needs.

Grade 3

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Much provision is good, particularly in the sixth-form and for students with additional learning needs. Teaching is satisfactory but in a minority of lessons there is not enough learning. The college knows learning lags behind teaching, but it has not consistently interpreted why. Students in the best lessons seen learned with zest, listened intently, concentrated hard and participated fully in discussions. Dynamic teaching involved all the students, sustaining a demanding pace with varied, enterprising activities. In most lessons with suitable resources and sound planning, teachers made sure all students worked hard. In a minority, the teachers had low expectations of the quality and quantity of work, and did not engage all students. Here, too much talk by the teacher led to too little independent learning or group work. Teachers have good access to assessment information for each class, but do not always use it to plan work for individual students. At its best, regular marking shows students what they need to improve, but marking is not consistent.

Grade: 3

Curriculum, extended services and other activities

The curriculum is good and has been well adapted to suit the first Year 7 group. ICT is not taught to all in students in Key Stage 4, although from 2005 the college has plans to address this as well as offer more vocational options. The college promotes citizenship and cultural education well, notably in music, art and humanities; and through extra-curricular events. Problems caused by the current split site, notably long travelling time between lessons, curtail teaching and learning. The start of many lessons is delayed and disjointed, and activities, particularly end-of-lesson plenary discussion, are often cut short.

Many extended services cater for personal needs and interests well, particularly amongst the college's disaffected young people, making a real difference to their lives. This is because the partnerships between the college, its learning support unit, and agencies like the Crawley Learning Inclusion Project are very well developed. Good liaison with local schools, the education welfare officer and other services has successfully tackled previously poor attendance. Participation is good particularly in sports and the arts. Younger students consider the sports facilities to be 'wicked' and speak very positively about everything on offer. Accredited courses, for instance in drama, angling, outdoor education and music technology, encourage students to remain in college; while participation in the Forest Special School provides them with a chance to work outside, often with very young children, developing leadership and team building skills. While successfully meeting the personal needs of students and their families, the college is not yet sufficiently focused on using the extended services to raise students' basic literacy and numeracy skills and academic progress.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The college takes care of its students and most of them feel safe and well looked after. Staff and governors conscientiously monitor racial incidents and follow them up effectively. Child protection procedures are secure. The college takes a responsible approach to health and safety matters. Hard work and early intervention for students with challenging behaviour have reduced fixed-term exclusions, and the college uses permanent exclusion as a last resort. Although a significant number of bullying incidents was reported to inspectors, students said the college acted decisively on those it knew about.

Support for, and promotion of, students' learning across the college is satisfactory. Teachers set regular homework and students use their contact books well to record it. They value the house system and its strong influence highly. When the college uniform was recently introduced, the students themselves requested that house colours were included in the logo. The college makes appropriate alternative provision for disaffected students, and guides their choices towards courses that meet their personal and academic needs.

Induction into the college at Year 7 is handled well, with students settling quickly into college life. A good and developing programme for careers guidance is supported well by the local community and the Connexions service. Sixth-form students feel that the advice and guidance for course and career choices are good. For other students they are satisfactory, as is transition at the end of Year 11.

Grade: 3

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a strong and clear, inclusive vision of the path the college is taking to improve standards. She articulates it very well but has yet to achieve a fully consistent approach from all staff to accelerate students' progress. Together with the leadership team, she has taken decisive action to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and has shared this with the teachers. This work is starting to have a positive effect on learning. Inspectors found, when they observed lessons with senior staff, that their evaluation of the quality of lessons was secure.

The leadership team believes that it has set a clear direction for the college and is making good progress. Inspectors found that strengths are more potent than the weaknesses, and this is driving up standards at a reasonable but not exceptional pace. The team works hard and decisively, providing good models to staff and an influential presence. However, it is pursuing too many priorities, not all of which contribute strongly enough to a tight and urgent agenda for raising standards. Self-evaluation has reliably identified and analysed correctly the school's strengths and weaknesses but current plans have too many diverse priorities. Plans do not always show exactly, and in detail, what outcome is expected and when various stages should be complete, so it is hard for managers to check on the current state of improvements. This makes it difficult to gauge the effects actions are having on students' progress.

The governing body works very diligently and is proud of the college's achievements, in particular its inclusive role in the community. However, it has not always focused with sufficient rigour on actions which will raise students' attainment. Long-standing acceptance of the college's low standards has not been sufficiently questioned.

Some subject leaders are effectively driving improvement forward; their planning is increasingly well judged but has not sufficiently focused on raising attainment rapidly. College managers promote links with partners and projects well that support vulnerable students and their families.

Grade: 3

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet 'Complaining about HMI-led Ofsted inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.
© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2004. This document may be freely reproduced in whole or in part, for non-commercial purposes, provided the source and the date are acknowledged.**