



The Cedars Upper School and Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109650
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 278230
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Margaret Jones HMI

This inspection of the community College was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive	Community College address	Mentmore Road Linslade, Leighton Buzzard Bedfordshire LU7 2AE
School category	Community	Telephone number	01525 219300
Age range of pupils	13–19	Fax number	01525 850864
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair	Mr Tim Alberry
Number on roll (community College)	1300	Headteacher	Mr Andrew Warren
Number on roll (6th form)	359		
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous community College inspection	4 December 2000		

Age group 13–19	Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006	Inspection number 278230
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the community College

Cedars is a large upper school serving the South Bedfordshire town of Leighton Buzzard and beyond. It became a specialist mathematics and computing College in September 2006 and at the same time became a Microsoft Sponsored Specialist School. The school has a very large sixth form. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is student mobility. There are very few students with English as an additional language and none at the early stage of acquisition. The school is an active member, along with other local education providers, of a partnership to deliver enhanced curriculum opportunities at Key Stage 4. Cedars has achieved National Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the community College

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. Inspection findings confirm the school's effective self-evaluation outcomes. It achieved specialist college status for mathematics and computing in September 2006 and this has already had a positive impact on provision. The school is very well led and managed. The headteacher provides dynamic leadership, and the leadership team share a clear ambition to become a high achieving school where all students reach their maximum potential.

Students' personal development is excellent. They behave very well and show real enjoyment in their learning. Students make an outstanding contribution to their local community and enjoy an excellent range of enrichment activities. This is a school where every child matters. The students are particularly well cared for and feel safe and this is contributing to their desire to do well. Students understand the need for healthy lifestyles and take part in many physical activities. Provision for careers education and guidance is very well organised and effective. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory but there are not enough planned opportunities for reflection and students' are not prepared well enough for life in a multi-cultural society. The school has an innovative approach to the curriculum which is responsive to the needs of the students. Although statutory requirements are not met at Key Stage 4 in information and communication technology (ICT) this does not affect standards. Furthermore, the school's improvement plan demonstrates that the weakness has been identified and appropriate actions are being taken to address the slight irregularity.

Achievement is good and improving year on year. Standards in the main school are outstanding and in the sixth form they are good. Teaching is generally of a high standard and students respect their teachers. As a result they make rapid progress. In a few lessons, on-going assessment of whether students have understood the work does not take place, and students are not always set individual targets. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well because of the very good support they receive. The majority of parents are positive in their views about the school and feel their views are taken into account.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form that serves its students well. Thorough self evaluation identifies many strong features and the areas where development is needed. Students are highly motivated and are very appreciative of the provision made.

Overall, achievement and standards in the sixth form are good as a result of experienced and knowledgeable teaching. The percentage of higher grades at advanced level has improved. Students' personal development is outstanding and they feel they are very well supported both on a personal level and through academic monitoring. There is excellent provision to help students make higher education choices. Targets are used to motivate and inform but are of a general nature and not made sufficiently clear

and specific. Independent learning is encouraged and students have ready access to an excellent library and resources centre.

The largely academic curriculum is designed to meet the aspirations of most students well. Minority A level subjects such as electronics and film studies are well subscribed, but currently vocational options are very limited. Students are keen to take part in the many enrichment opportunities such as the popular 'mock trial' event and successful drama productions. Many students take advantage of the opportunities to take responsibility, for example, through the 'Mencap' charity scheme, sixth form council, and support for younger students in school.

The sixth form is a very significant part of the school and is well led and managed. Good sixth form accommodation and learning resources are used well to create an inspiring learning environment.

What the community College should do to improve further

- Improve the provision for spiritual development and the awareness and understanding of diverse cultures.
- Ensure the consistency of teaching by improving assessment in lessons and setting individual targets for students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good with many students making fast progress because of their excellent attitudes to learning and strong work ethic. Standards are now outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well because of learning programmes matched to their needs.

The attainment of students on entry to the school is consistently above average. Many start school in Year 9 at levels above that expected for those of similar age. All students continue to make good progress. As a result, many attain standards that are well above the national average by the end of Key Stage 3. Achievement was particularly high in 2006. For instance, standards in each of the core subjects were significantly above average with over a half of students achieving Level 6 or higher.

Students in Key Stage 4 make good progress overall to attain very high standards by the end of Year 11. The proportion gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE has risen steadily since 2003 to reach 74% in 2006. This is significantly above the national average with virtually all students achieving at least one qualification. The school met most of its attainment targets in 2006 and continues to set even more challenging targets for the future.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. Students are given very good opportunities to lead a healthy life style, make positive contributions to the community and prepare for their future economic well-being.

Most students enjoy their education very much. As a result, attendance is above average. About two-thirds of students progress to the sixth form and the majority in the sixth form go on to higher education. Students' attitudes and behaviour in the school are very good and often excellent in the sixth form. Students take great interest in their work and involve themselves fully in lessons. Many display a sense of responsibility for their own learning, such as working independently in the library. The rate of participation in extracurricular activities is very good.

Students have very good relationships with adults and each other. They learn about their rights and responsibilities very well. Students take appropriate responsibility through membership of Year Councils, the School Council and the Governing Body. Participation in many charitable activities is exceptional. Sixth form volunteers work as learning partners, peer counsellors and provide in-class support.

The school's aim to promote spiritual, cultural, moral and social education is achieved satisfactorily. Most students take an examined course in religious education but there is less focus on their spiritual development. The school misses opportunities to enable students to reflect on their beliefs and values. Students' participation in a number of foreign and domestic trips contributes to their cultural development well. However, not enough is done to make students aware of the challenges associated with living in a multi-cultural society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good both in the main school and the sixth form and this makes a positive contribution to the good achievement of the students. Students come ready to learn and teachers have excellent relationships with them. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and these factors provide a positive learning environment. There are a number of examples where teaching and learning is outstanding, with most teaching being good. The majority of lessons are well planned, with clear learning objectives that are shared with the students. Effective learning is assisted by the use of skilful questioning enabling the students to develop their understanding and by the linking of new knowledge to already familiar points of understanding. Most lessons have a variety of interesting activities to maintain pace

with opportunities for independent learning and work that is suitable for the needs of all students. More ICT facilities are being provided now that the school has specialist status and these are beginning to be used to enhance learning.

However, inconsistencies occur in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The most significant areas of inconsistency are the use of targets and assessment in lessons. In a number of cases, targets are not personalised or specific and this inhibits learning. The assessment of the students' understanding during a few lessons is weak and this means that the work provided does not meet the needs of all the students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of most students well. Strong emphasis is placed on supporting learning, for example through the extensive personal, social and religious education programme. A good range of options are offered in Year 10 and a number of students undertake vocational courses in conjunction with a local school and college that form the 'Learning Warehouse'. Statutory requirements for ICT however, are not fulfilled for all students in Key Stage 4. Work related learning is included in many subjects and through high profile work experience.

The very large sixth form supports a wide range of subjects but currently vocational options have not proved viable. Religious education is included in the examined General Studies course but the curriculum offered does not enable all sixth formers to engage in activities which fully promote spiritual development.

Many students participate in wide ranging extra curricular activities, especially in music, sport and drama and the curriculum is enriched by extensive involvement in the community, charity work, Duke of Edinburgh scheme and special events that provide challenge and excitement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' excellent personal development and their high achievement stems from the outstanding care, support and guidance that they receive from the school.

Students are very clear that what distinguishes the school is its friendly and caring ethos. Students feel safe, and have the confidence that staff would take appropriate action should incidents occur which would threaten that security. Above all students' views are listened to so that they have a genuine say in the way that the school is run. Because of this, they develop self-confidence and a mature appreciation of the wide range of opportunities offered by the school. This maturity is the basis of their excellent attitudes to learning so that they respond well to teachers' commitment and enthusiasm.

Liaison with middle schools is very effective and induction procedures are successful so that students settle quickly at Cedars. Students are well supported. They are known as individuals; their learning difficulties are supported effectively and behaviour managed in an equitable manner. Sixth form students provide an additional level of excellent support: as role models, through their attachment to classes or through the mentoring scheme.

Arrangements for safeguarding, child protection and medical support are robust. The school has very good systems for tracking students' academic and personal progress. Staff are vigilant so that students who are undergoing personal difficulties or who are vulnerable are very well supported. Students receive high quality vocational and personal guidance about life-style choices. There are very effective links with specialist agencies, such as the Connexions Service.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In the two years he has been in post, the headteacher has successfully focussed the school on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The leadership team have worked well together to create a calm, working atmosphere for the students where all can flourish. The specialist college status has already been successfully used to provide better facilities and is having a positive effect on teaching and learning across the school. The school gives good value for money.

The leadership team work together efficiently and are very experienced. They know the school well and have accurately identified areas for development. A clear system of line management accountability is in operation and managers at all levels understand what is expected of them. Middle management is strong and is enhanced by well focused training and development. Governance is good. The governing body contains professional expertise which is effectively deployed for the benefit of the school. Governors are well informed and supportive and are beginning to develop the confidence to challenge and hold the school to account. There are still some infringements of statutory requirements. The most serious of these is the lack of ICT at Key Stage 4 for all students. This is intended to be addressed by the specialist college plan. The school has a race relations policy, but the impact of the implementation of this policy is not assessed annually. The few minority ethnic students are well integrated and achieve well.

Accurate evaluation of teaching has taken place and regular review of the work of departments is having a positive impact. The quality of whole school planning is good overall and departmental plans are well structured with specific targets. However, links to spending are not always explicit.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	Community College Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the community College work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the community College's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this community College require special measures?	No	
Does this community College require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 November 2006

Cedars Upper School and Community College, Mentmore Road, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, LU7 2AE

Dear Students

Thank you for all the help you gave the inspectors when we visited your school on 1-2 November. We enjoyed talking with you. You told us how much you enjoy being at Cedars. It is a very good school with many excellent features. We thought you would like to know what was good about your school and how we thought it could get even better

- The school is well led and managed and there is a very good team spirit among the staff and governors, who want you all to do your very best.
- You enjoy the wide range of activities that are provided for you, especially the music and sport.
- Becoming a specialist mathematics and computing college has already brought some advantages.
- Teaching is good and you achieve very well in your subjects. Standards in examination results are very high.
- You behave very well and make healthy choices. You showed outstanding motivation in your lessons.
- You told us that you feel safe in school and are very well looked after. You told us that your opinions are really listened to at Cedars. There is excellent guidance and support for those who need it.

Things we thought could be improved:

- More work needs to be done on improving the opportunities for you to reflect on values and beliefs, and for you to prepare for life in a multi-cultural society.
- In some lessons teachers could keep a closer check on whether you have understood your work, and it would be helpful if you were set individual targets.
- The curriculum in ICT for Key Stage students and RE for sixth form students needs to meet requirements better.

We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools