

Coombeshead College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113522
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	279187
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Green HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1581
6th form	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Liam McGrath
Principal	Richard Haigh
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2000
School address	Coombeshead Road Newton Abbot TQ12 1PT
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Coombeshead College is slightly larger than other similar schools and shares its sixth form provision with two other schools. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals are about average. The school was awarded specialist status as a Media Arts College in 2002.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Students in all year groups are now making adequate progress after a recent decline in both standards and progress. Reasons for this decline stemmed from staffing issues in core areas, which have now been rectified, and past inconsistencies in teaching and the monitoring of students' progress. The extra support being provided by the Devon Curriculum Services has helped to move the school on and to ensure that students' achievement is satisfactory.

In both 2005 and 2006, Year 11 students' GCSE results showed that they had not made enough progress from when they started in the school. The school has tackled this issue well through improving the tracking of students' progress and putting in extra support for their learning. This action has improved the progress students make and current levels of achievement in the school are now higher than they were previously. Inspection evidence shows that progress is now satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Support to improve the literacy of boys in the lower school is having a positive impact on raising standards and improving progress. Students in the lower school make good progress in mathematics and progress in English is now improving and is acceptable. Achievements in the sixth form are satisfactory in terms of the standards students reach in relation to their starting points. The majority of the students progress to higher education.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There are some good features in the care for students' personal welfare which parents appreciate. The student services support team gives effective help, especially for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Students' personal development is good. The school works well with a wide range of partners and outside agencies to look after the well-being of learners. The school strongly promotes healthy lifestyles and is pursuing the healthy schools award. Students are successfully encouraged to be involved in the wider community, and to participate in many local activities several of which are linked to the school's specialist status. Attendance is now monitored carefully and is satisfactory overall. However, a few parents persist in taking their children on holidays in school time.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there is still a wide variation in the effectiveness of students' learning. Planning of lessons and teaching during lessons focus too much on what teachers do and not enough on what students should learn. Investment in information and communication technology (ICT) has led to good resources being provided and in many lessons students work hard and enjoy using ICT, although they would still like even more use of media technology. There is a persistent problem with low level disruptive behaviour from a small number of students in some lessons, and this interferes with the learning of other students. A significant minority of parents rightly complain about this. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school's specialist college status is helping students to develop useful skills. The school is actively developing more vocational courses and alternative courses to GCE A level, through its local learning partnership. A successful example is the Skills for Life course which helps students with lower literacy skills and some students with learning difficulties and disabilities in particular.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The school's assessment of its effectiveness is realistic. Although the school previously had a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement, actions were not rigorously and systematically followed up. The new extended senior leadership team and some new middle managers are now implementing fully the system

of monitoring and review. Senior leaders and the supportive governing body are fully aware of the issues to be addressed regarding students' progress and are working hard to remedy the situation. A more consistent approach to improving teaching and learning has started to raise standards, particularly in the lower school. Parents and carers are now more actively involved through the introduction of review days but there is still further work to do to engage them more successfully.

The programme for staff development is sound in most respects. However, not all staff have received adequate training on safeguarding students. The school is now raising standards and improving academic progress through the restructuring of teaching and learning responsibilities and the new house system. The recent focused action to improve the school shows that it has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provision is satisfactory and GCE advanced level pass rates are good and appropriate in relation to students' starting points. Attendance is good and the students make adequate progress in most subjects. Students make better progress in a few subjects than their previous achievement suggests they should, for example in psychology and sociology, because the provision in these subjects is good. About three quarters of the students enter higher education. The sixth form provision is enhanced by the strong collaborative arrangements with two other local sixth forms and opportunities for students at levels 1 and 2 are now being developed further. However, the range of vocational and enrichment opportunities in the sixth form is still limited. Individual support for students is good, although the delivery of the tutorial programme is inconsistent. Using students' views to improve teaching is still undeveloped. Retention of students between Years 12 and 13 is high.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lesson planning and teaching focus more closely on students' learning needs and raising expectations of lower achieving students.
- Improve behaviour and ensure that low level disruption does not interfere with the learning of other students.
- Make sure that planned actions to improve performance of students and staff are carried out systematically and with rigour.
- Provide all staff with effective training on safeguarding students and on managing relationships with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall students' achievement is satisfactory and standards are improving. In 2005 and 2006, GCSE standards were below national levels. Although students of higher ability performed as expected, some other low attaining Year 11 students made insufficient progress and this was made worse by underachievement in previous years. Boys in particular did not make enough progress. The school has analysed the subjects where students performed below expectations and put in place appropriate improvement strategies. It has recognised the weaker comparative performance in English at Key Stages 3 and 4 and science at Key Stage 3 and already has in

place good measures to ensure better performance. Achievement of students in mathematics has been high at both key stages.

Target setting and tracking are now being used effectively to improve students' progress. As a result of the actions being taken, standards are beginning to rise and students in Years 10 and 11 are now making satisfactory progress. In general, students produce better quality work in practical subjects than in academic areas. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Recent initiatives and new courses introduced are helping them to improve their progress further.

Pass rates in the sixth form are good and the progress students make is broadly satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Most students enjoy school, want to learn, and are generally considerate in their behaviour towards each other. Attendance is satisfactory. Students feel safe and are confident that any bullying will be dealt with swiftly by the staff. Students have an informed awareness of the importance of developing healthier lifestyles; for example, through action taken by their college student council, healthier menus have been introduced. Participation in sports and other extra-curricular activities which promote healthier lifestyles is good.

Students' moral and social development is good. They show a sound sense of right and wrong. The active college student council makes a valuable contribution to school life and students sit on several planning committees together with governors and staff. Two student councillors are also members of the governing body. Students give good support to the wide variety of fund raising activities for charities. Students' spiritual development is not as strong as their cultural awareness which is developed well in music, art, drama and religious education. The school has forged fruitful links with schools in Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia, which also increase students' cultural understanding, as it prepares itself to acquire International School status.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, in the past, there has not been clear enough attention on what students are actually learning in lessons. As a result, students did not make appropriate progress. Although this situation has improved, there is still inconsistency in how well teachers focus on students' learning needs.

Many teachers are now working hard to improve learning. The majority of lessons have clear learning objectives and activities which generally engage students. In many lessons, students enjoy opportunities which emphasise performance such as speaking and listening or role play: strengths which have been encouraged by the school's specialism of media arts. Many lessons use ICT successfully to engage students; however, opportunities are often missed to develop students' ICT skills.

Although work is regularly marked, too often, marking gives students little guidance on how to improve their performance and poor presentation is not questioned enough. In some subjects, students' progress is made more difficult by classes being taught by several different teachers, breaking up the continuity of learning. Relationships are generally respectful, but regularly, low level disruptive behaviour by a few students causes distractions to learning, slackening pace and progress in the lessons concerned. Sometimes students become disengaged because the work is not pitched at the right level for them and this is particularly true for less able students.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the sixth form. However, as in the rest of the school, it is still too focused on teachers presenting, with not enough emphasis on developing students' independent learning and self-assessment skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. At Key Stage 3 the requirements for citizenship are not met fully. At Key Stage 4 the needs of students are met adequately by recent additions to the range of academic and vocational courses. The Skills for Life course is effective in improving motivation and giving students workplace skills. Through the sixth form Newton Abbot Partnership, a good range of advanced, vocational and applied courses are offered, often tailored to individual needs. Work-related learning is adequately reinforced through initiatives that include a fair trade business.

The specialist college status impacts positively on the curriculum for students of all ages with significant investment in media technology, including ICT, but its use across the curriculum is inconsistent. A large number of students take part in the interesting range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including Radio Coombeshead and international curriculum links. A good programme of themed days enhances the curriculum well, such as the recent day on global environment matters which students enjoyed. Gifted and talented students are well catered for.

A structured programme is in place for students with learning difficulties or other disabilities. The school is trying to improve numeracy and literacy through extra lessons in basic skills and homework clubs but the impact of these initiatives is not yet sufficiently evident across all groups of students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The care, guidance and support for students are satisfactory. Child protection procedures are fully in place, but not all staff have received comprehensive training in identifying the signs of child abuse or neglect. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme places appropriate emphasis on the development of safe and healthy lifestyles. Tracking of the academic progress of all students is being developed well through the new house tutor arrangements. The student services team provides good support for the more vulnerable students and those who give cause for concern.

Students with learning difficulties or disabilities receive appropriate individual support. There is increasingly effective tracking of underachieving students and those with severe behavioural problems. Option programmes for students in Year 9 and Year 11 are well planned and provide sound support and guidance on careers. However, students going into the sixth form do not always receive information and advice giving the full picture of what other opportunities may be available to them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team is relatively new and has accurately identified the school's main strengths and weaknesses. It recognises that the school and students have not made sufficient progress in recent years. With the support of the local authority and governors they have put in place structures, procedures and personnel that have the capacity to bring about improvement quickly. Whilst it is too early to judge the overall impact of these changes, senior leaders recognise that actions to improve students' performance must now be carried out more systematically and with increased rigour. The recently appointed head of the sixth form has already implemented effective changes.

Senior leaders are giving good support to some newly appointed curriculum leaders. The programme of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, which previously was not systematic enough, is now better and includes better use of data on students' achievements and tracking of students' progress. Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching and learning through systematic observations but these observations do not give clear enough messages about the impact of teaching on learning and on students' long-term progress.

Most of the points from the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. The school is trying to involve parents further through its review days, but creating effective relationships with parents is still a priority for development. The school has worked hard to overcome staff shortages in key areas in recent years. The governing body is well led and governors have a growing understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The capacity for the school to improve is satisfactory and value for money is also satisfactory.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School 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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed speaking with you and hearing your views about your school. We found that your school gives you a satisfactory standard of education. We noted the good working relationships that many of you have with your teachers and are pleased that so many of you enjoy attending school and taking part in the different activities. We were also impressed by your Coombeshead radio broadcasts. It is clear that the school helps you to develop as individuals and we agree with you that the school helps to build your confidence. Although teaching and learning are satisfactory, we would like to point out how the school can improve more.

- Teachers should plan lessons more carefully to help you concentrate more and take better account of the differences in your knowledge and ability to learn.
- The school should tackle more quickly situations where students (who are in the minority) interrupt lessons and do not behave as well as they should.
- The school should make sure that it carries out more systematically its plans for improvements. For example, it should make sure that the systems used to record your progress are used more carefully to track the improvements in your work.
- The school leaders should provide all staff with effective training on protecting students and on working well with parents.

The school takes suitable care of you, especially when you have problems, and makes sure there are people to help. Many of you are very involved in the wide range of sporting and other activities the school provides for you outside of lessons. We hope you will enjoy school more when the new buildings are finished.

My team and I would like to thank you for your help and cooperation during this inspection; we wish you well for the future.