



Okehampton College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113540
LEA Devon
Inspection number 279195
Inspection dates 22 March 2006 to 23 March 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Redpath HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Mill Road
School category	Community		Okehampton
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Devon EX20 1PW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01837 650910
Number on roll	1425	Fax number	01837 650918
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr I Courtney
Date of previous inspection	7 February 2000	Headteacher	Mr D Chapman

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Okehampton College is a specialist technology college of larger than average size. In recent years the number of students on roll has increased annually. Students are drawn from the market town of Okehampton and a wide area of West Devon. Although the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average, the college's catchment area includes some neighbourhoods where incomes are low and there is significant deprivation. Almost all students are of White British origin and are fluent in English. The percentage of students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly lower than that found in other schools. There have been several recent building developments, which include a new technology centre and refurbishment of a drama theatre. The school's resources are used extensively by the local community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Okehampton College is a good college with several outstanding features. This view is consistent with the school's self-evaluation and with the extremely positive views of both students and parents. The acting principal is very successfully leading the college forward. The very strong commitment of leaders at all levels has created a shared sense of purpose within the whole college community. There has been marked progress since the time of the last inspection. All the issues identified for improvement have been addressed. The college provides good value for money and demonstrates a strong capacity for further improvement.

Students enjoy coming to school, they have positive attitudes and behave well. There are very good relationships between staff and students and between students themselves. All are included in the life of the school, as well as those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Teaching is good. Teachers are committed to raising achievement and encourage students to work hard. As a result, students make good progress. Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties make good progress in managing their behaviour and developing their social skills as a result of the high quality support they receive. There are limited opportunities in some lessons for students to discuss their own ideas and develop their speaking skills. Teachers' planning does not always contain sufficient challenge for the most capable students. Consequently, a few higher attaining students do not achieve the highest results.

The college's technology status has had a positive impact on improving students' information and communication technology (ICT) skills and their performance in technology subjects. The excellent range of after school and lunchtime activities are well attended by students. The care, guidance and support provided for students are of a very high standard and supported extremely well by links with external agencies.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's view that the sixth form's provision is good. Students make good progress and achieve high results in a wide range of advanced (A) level and vocational examinations. They develop into sensible and mature young adults with a positive attitude to learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and form positive relationships with students. Students appreciate the extremely good personal and academic guidance they receive when choosing future courses and career options. The leadership and management are good and resources are managed efficiently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend teachers' planning so all lessons include sufficient challenge for higher attaining students.
- Improve opportunities for students to discuss their ideas and develop their speaking skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress and achieve well. Students start in Year 7 with standards which are close to the national average. At Key Stage 3, students make good progress, particularly in mathematics and science. By the end of Year 9, their performance is consistently higher than the national average. At Key Stage 4, students make slower progress but still achieve above average results by the end of Year 11. Students' grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are above average each year. Achievement is highest in mathematics and technology subjects. In both key stages, challenging targets are set for subject departments. In 2005, the school achieved its GCSE targets and exceeded its technology college targets in science, mathematics and ICT.

Students in the sixth form make good progress relative to their starting points. They achieve above average results in A level examinations and in the vocational courses.

Girls perform better than average across the school. Boys' performance varies each year and is lower than average, although not significantly below the level achieved by boys nationally. Progress for higher attaining students ranges from satisfactory to good. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress, especially in managing their behaviour and developing their social skills, because of the carefully targeted support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students are proud of their college. They are enthusiastic learners and enjoy participating in the excellent range of extra curricular activities. They feel safe and appreciate the way in which staff listen to their concerns and deal firmly with any incidents of misbehaviour. New students are pleased with the way they are introduced to the school. As one Year 7 pupil remarked, 'people were very welcoming, nothing was too much trouble'. Attendance is satisfactory and in line with the national average for schools.

The promotion of fitness programmes and a wide range of sporting activities encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students are aware of the need to eat healthily and many take advantage of the healthy food options in the canteen. They are prepared well for adult life. Students take part in work experience programmes and develop good numeracy, literacy and ICT skills. In the sixth form, they develop good independent study skills. However, although students listen carefully, some lack confidence in voicing their opinions.

Overall, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Relationships are a strength of the college and students report that the college is a very friendly place. There is an ethos of trust and respect amongst staff and students and behaviour is good. Members of the college council are keen to make the college a better place,

for example by promoting recycling. Students have few opportunities to reflect on their work and lives and their knowledge of other cultures is limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good across the school. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and encourage students to succeed. Excellent relationships between staff and students contribute strongly to a productive working atmosphere. When Year 8 pupils were asked how they had enjoyed their mathematics lesson, one commented 'we like everything about it – and the teacher too!' In the best lessons, teachers provide students with opportunities to think for themselves and develop their own ideas. This was seen in a science lesson when students conducted experiments and discussed the results and also in technology lessons when students talked enthusiastically about how they designed and made their products. In some lessons, teachers direct the pupils too closely, and insufficient time is given for students to discuss what they have learned. This limits opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills. Skilled teaching assistants are effective in supporting students' learning and enabling those with learning difficulties and disabilities to play a full part in lessons.

Assessment is used well to plan lessons, which ensures that tasks build steadily on previous learning. Students know their targets for further improvement and understand how they might achieve them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The college provides a good curriculum, which is flexible in responding to the individual needs of students. Provision at Key Stage 4 includes a good range of GCSE subjects, business studies and work experience. Sixth form students are able to choose from a wide range of A level and vocational courses.

The curriculum is adapted especially well to support students with behaviour and learning difficulties. Provision includes extra help in class and work in small groups to improve numeracy, literacy and social skills. There are examples of very good provision for gifted and talented students, such as in science where Year 7 students are able to study a GCSE course in physics. In some subjects, planned activities do not always fully extend the learning of higher achieving students.

The college's technology status has contributed greatly to the high quality of technology courses. It has also increased the planned use of ICT across other subjects. An excellent range of extra curricular clubs and activities, including music, sports and outdoor pursuits, successfully enhances and extends students' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. The college is rightly proud of its caring ethos, which supports the needs of all its students. The thoughtful strategies to support students with emotional and behavioural difficulties have been very successful in reducing the rate of exclusions. Staff have a very good understanding of the needs of vulnerable students. Excellent links with external agencies ensure all students get the help they need. The college has an outstanding programme to aid students' transition from primary schools, which ensures new entrants settle in quickly. Appropriate arrangements for child protection are in place and teachers ensure that students work in a healthy and safe environment.

Teachers give students thoughtful guidance on how to improve their work and offer beneficial support through mentoring and after school sessions. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is carefully planned and enables them to work successfully in classes alongside their peers. Sixth form students value the guidance they are given when choosing their courses and the flexibility shown by staff in accommodating their preferences. Students appreciate the very good careers advice on the pathways they can follow on leaving school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good with many very good and distinctive features. These include the very strong commitment of leaders at all levels to further development. Consequently, as many students themselves acknowledge, the college is steadily improving. The acting principal is very effectively continuing to move the college forward, building on the considerable progress of recent years. Leaders have been encouraged to develop their skills, which enable them to set a clear direction to other teachers in critical and evaluative, but open and supportive, ways. There are good arrangements for the monitoring of teaching, although in some cases there is insufficient focus on the best ways for students to learn.

Data are used well to track students' progress and identify those who underperform. An impressive aspect of the college's quest for further improvement is the involvement of staff, governors, parents, students and representatives of the local community in shaping the future direction of the college. A conference called 'Our Vision ... Your Vision' is one example of the involvement of all these groups. Most parents are very supportive of the school, and the governors have a very clear understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development, giving appropriate levels of challenge and support.

The college's status as a technology college has been effectively managed with increasing benefits to the curriculum, buildings, learning resources and students' achievements. Planning for the next stages of development is well advanced and shows

logical progression from the first phase. Overall, the college's finances are well managed with spending patterns clearly linked to priorities at any particular time.

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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>	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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
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	2	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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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; 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	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students

As you know your college was inspected on 22 – 23 March 2006. I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your college. I thank those of you who helped with the inspection by talking with us about your work and your life in the college. Many of your parents or carers returned a questionnaire and we also took their views into account when making judgements.

Here are the main points:

- the college provides you with a good education
- good leadership by the acting principal and senior staff has helped the school get better since the time of the last inspection
- you enjoy coming to school and behave well
- you get on well with each other and with staff
- teachers are skilled and help you gain good results
- the college provides a good range of subjects and an excellent range of lunchtime and after school clubs and activities
- becoming a technology college has helped the college to improve your information and communication technology (ICT) skills and helped you to achieve high standards in technology subjects
- teachers and their assistants look after you well and are very successful at working with other agencies to make sure you receive proper guidance and support.

Your school could get even better by:

- teachers planning their lessons to include more challenge so some of you gain higher results
- improving opportunities for you to discuss your own ideas and develop your speaking skills.

You can help by always doing your best work and being prepared to discuss your views.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Redpath HMI (Lead Inspector)