



# Robert Blake Science College

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 123878  
**LEA** Somerset  
**Inspection number** 281581  
**Inspection dates** 12 October 2005 to 13 October 2005  
**Reporting inspector** Peter Griffiths HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Hamp Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Community		Bridgwater
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Somerset TA6 6AW
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01278 456243
<b>Number on roll</b>	568	<b>Fax number</b>	01278 444 987
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 January 2003	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Ann Winter

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11 to 16	12 October 2005 - 13 October 2005	281581

---

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, 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.

## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

Robert Blake Science College acquired its specialist status in 2003. Though smaller than average, the college is increasing in popularity and numbers are rising.

Nearly all students are from White British backgrounds. The majority are from one of the most deprived wards in Somerset. As a result, many students have significant disadvantages not least in terms of low aspirations. Recently, the school has attracted a greater proportion of students from other communities giving it a more comprehensive intake.

Attainment on entry to the school is low, especially students' literacy skills. The number of students with special educational needs is well above average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Robert Blake Science College is a good school with some outstanding features. The leadership and management of the school are good. They have a very good understanding of their effectiveness, what they need to do to continue to improve and are well placed to do so. The school has implemented an effective range of strategies to improve learning and achievement, which has led to students of all abilities succeeding. In particular, there have been rapid gains in standards in science and mathematics where students are making remarkable progress. The proportion of students who achieved five or more higher GCSE grades has doubled over the last five years.

The good teaching ensures that students show positive attitudes to their work and make very good progress. The teachers' good subject knowledge lends confidence to their teaching styles, which engage students. The work is well matched to the students' needs so all can succeed. Student behaviour is well managed. Learning support assistants are well directed to support learning.

This is a school where every child matters. The students are well cared for and feel safe and this is contributing to their desire to do well. Students enjoy coming to school. Many take part in the wide range of extra activities. The vast majority of parents are very happy with the school and all it offers. This was clearly expressed by parents who said: 'We are delighted with the school; We cannot praise the staff highly enough'. 'We have been surprised by our son's improved confidence and full participation in the life of the school'.

The school has clearly demonstrated that it has a very strong capacity to improve. It has successfully addressed all the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. This has been accomplished alongside the drive on learning and achievement and its successful development as a specialist science college. The school has formed excellent working partnerships that have contributed to the achievement and well-being of the students. The school has used its resources very effectively and provides very good value for money.

### Grade: 2

### What the school should do to improve further

- further develop the strategies that were used at Key Stage 3 that led to both boys and girls achieving equal standards in some subjects
- use the existing good practice in departmental reviews to develop further the monitoring and evaluation undertaken by subject leaders
- continue to take every opportunity to involve parents in supporting their children and in becoming involved in the life of the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

When students enter the school in Year 7, their standards are below and sometimes well below average. In particular, their literacy skills are often weak.

By the end of Key Stage 3, students have made remarkably good progress. Though there has been some variation in English, the 2005 test results confirm the good progress being made by students. In both mathematics and science, the progress made by the students has been exceptional, placing them in the top ten per cent of schools for mathematics and the top five per cent for science.

One of the school's strengths is its relentless focus on learning and achievement. Particularly at Key Stage 3, the support provided for students has ensured that their needs have been fully met. As a result, boys and girls have achieved equally well and students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented have made good or better progress.

In 2005, at the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students who achieved five or more higher GCSE grades was a further improvement on previous years. Though this proportion is below the national average, it represents a doubling of the number of students obtaining such grades over the last five years.

In both key stages, challenging targets are set for subject departments. In 2005, the GCSE targets were met or exceeded in three-quarters of subjects.

Grade: 2

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

A very wide range of opportunities arises in lessons and out-of-school activities for students to develop their social and cultural awareness. They have repeatedly shown their concern for the needs of others through the money they have raised for charities. They readily participate in the wide range of social and cultural exchanges and visits offered by the school.

Students' attitudes towards the school and to lessons are good. Students feel safe and well cared for. Behaviour is satisfactory. The school 'Behaviour for Learning' policy helps to set high expectations for students. Relationships between students and staff are good. The school takes issues such as bullying seriously and has trained a number of members of staff in ways to deal with problems through reconciliation. This has had a marked impact on reducing bullying, although a minority of students consider it remains a problem. Attendance is satisfactory. The monitoring of absences is well managed and very effective. The firm response to absence has led to a significant improvement in attendance in all years. The school makes every effort to support those students, and their families, where regular attendance is a problem.

The school makes an excellent contribution to the students' improved health and well-being. Students improve their understanding of aspects of health through the

life skills programme and through other subjects such as science and physical education (PE). In addition to PE, the sports programme successfully engages students in a range of additional sporting activities at lunchtimes and after school. The school, with the support of the school nurse, runs a weekly health clinic which provides advice and support for individual students. The clinics' workshops on issues such as coping with stress are very popular and contribute to students' health. The students enjoy the breakfast club and have welcomed the wider range of healthy meals available at lunchtime.

Through the careers programme and support from Connexions, students have a very good knowledge of the world of work and respond enthusiastically to the opportunities presented by the well organised work experience programme.

Grade: 2

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good and, as a result, students are making good progress and achieving well. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and are committed to raising achievement. They make every effort to plan lessons that students will enjoy and where they can, succeed whatever their level of ability. There are many very good and some outstanding features of the teaching. Teachers do not simply plan lessons to get the content across to students. They plan them to ensure that students will learn at a cracking pace.

In most lessons, teachers ensure that students know exactly what they are expected to learn by the end of the lesson. Where lessons are not as good, the lessons are not focused closely enough on what it is that students are supposed to be learning. Another strength of the teaching is that planning takes account of students' targets so that they are all given work that is at the appropriate level for their ability. Teachers are calm yet firm in the way that they manage behaviour and they have high expectations of the students.

Teachers have adopted styles of teaching that encourage students to think for themselves and work independently. This is building their self-confidence and leading to increased interest and engagement. The school makes good use of its two advanced skills teachers to share best practice and train colleagues in more effective teaching and learning techniques which is contributing to greater consistency. The use of teaching assistants to support students' learning is a significant factor in enabling students to learn as well as they do. The assistants are very capable, well directed and provide support where it is most needed.

Grade: 2

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding. The school has adopted an imaginative and flexible response to the needs of individual students. This is consistent with its strong commitment to care for the individual. For example, when they join the school in Year 7, many students need to improve their literacy. Their needs are well met through additional English lessons and one-to-one support. Drama is effectively used to encourage students to reflect on how they behave and how this affects their learning. All students in Years 7 and 8 are taught how best to organise their learning. The school makes very good provision for its gifted and talented students as well as those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

In Years 10 and 11, the school ensures all students are offered courses that suit their aspirations. A wide range of subjects can be taken at GCSE, alongside courses in subjects such as business and information and communication technology. In addition, the school links well with Bridgewater College to offer courses such as catering and motor vehicle maintenance. The needs of disaffected Year 11 students are well met by the schools' development of a school based 'alternative curriculum'. This excellent programme involves the teaching of key skills, physical pursuits, emotional and social development and incorporates work experience. The overall impact of these curriculum changes has been demonstrated in improved exam results, improved attendance, less disaffection and improved behaviour at KS4.

A wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities enhance and extend students' learning. Grade: 1

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The school rightly prides itself on its excellent pastoral support for students. Heads of year, supported by a learning support assistant, provide very good leadership for their teams of tutors. Individual students feel safe and well supported by the school. They are encouraged to talk to staff about their concerns and worries. If they do not wish to talk to staff or need the support of other professionals they have easy access to a wide range of external agencies including Connexions advisers, health professionals and counsellors.

There are thorough procedures for child protection and risk assessment. Good guidance is provided at key points, such as options for GCSE courses and career choices. The school is well supported by external agencies such as Connexions.

Students' progress is monitored regularly through the 'work review' cycle and any underachievement is quickly identified and acted on. The students readily know the standard of their work and what they have to do to improve. Additional support and mentoring are offered when needed. Parents are regularly involved in their children's education.

Students are warm in their praise of the support provided by the school: 'The staff never give up on you even when you know you are being unreasonable. They always make you feel valued'.

Grade: 1

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

The leadership and management of the school are good. Standards and achievement have risen rapidly since the previous inspection. In virtually all aspects of the school's work there have been major improvements. The Headteacher is a significant strength and provides a clear direction for the school. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses. It knows what it needs to do to continue to improve and it is well placed to do so. There is a common sense of purpose amongst the staff. The number one priority for the school is to raise the achievement for all students and this is the main focus for all the work of the school. This really is a school where every child matters. As a result of the implementation of an effective range of strategies, students of all abilities are succeeding. In particular, there have been rapid gains in standards in science and mathematics where students are making remarkable progress.

The Headteacher's vision of a challenging yet caring school is reflected in a set of plans designed to move the school forward and make further improvements. These improvement plans drive the work of all the subjects in the school. Since the last inspection, there have been a large number of new initiatives introduced, all of them focused on raising achievement. These initiatives are, as the students and parents recognise, improving the behaviour and attitudes of the students and leading to better learning. There are many procedures to monitor the work of the school. Whilst these are all good, closer monitoring is needed to ensure that the excellent practice developed by some subject leaders becomes the practice of the whole school.

The school has formed excellent partnerships that have contributed to the achievement and to the well-being of the students. For example, the advanced skills teachers are developing a learning policy with neighbouring schools and the headteacher has enlisted a wide range of external agencies to support the students enabling staff to focus on teaching and achievement.

Governors provide very good support for the school leadership team in all aspects of its work. For example, they have recently been involved with staff and students in reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the behaviour policy.

Grade: 2



**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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

14 October 2005

Dear Students

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to us about your work, your life in school and all that you do.

we believe your school is a good school.

the Headteacher and those with responsibility have your best interests in mind. They work tirelessly to ensure that you are successful in all that you do.

you, through the year and school councils, play an important part in improving the school and your ideas are acted upon.

you enjoy coming to school and participate well in lessons and the out of school clubs and activities.

you achieve well particularly when teachers present the work in a way that meets with your needs.

another reason for your success is that you are well cared for.

the vast majority of you and your parents are very happy with the school and all that it offers.

becoming a science college has contributed to the higher standards you are achieving and has improved the resources including those for ICT. What your school needs to do to improve further:

ensure that boys and girls achieve equal standards in all subjects.

use existing good practice to develop further the monitoring and evaluation undertaken by subject leaders.

continue to take every opportunity to involve your parents in supporting you and your work and in becoming involved in the life of the school.

Yours sincerely

Peter Griffiths HM inspector