



Freman College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117540
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 285371
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 8 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Stephen Abbott LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Bowling Green Lane
School category	Community		SG9 9BT
Age range of pupils	13 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01763 271818
Number on roll	787	Fax number	01763 273467
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.J Martin
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2001	Headteacher	Ms. H Loughran

Age group 13 to 18	Inspection dates 7 June 2006 - 8 June 2006	Inspection number 285371
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Freman College is a smaller than average 13 to 19 community school, situated in the small town of Buntingford. Since September 2005 the college and its two partner middle schools have been jointly designated as a Specialist Humanities College. The college is the coordinator of a School Sports Partnership. Students are drawn from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds. Most join at age 13 from two local middle schools, where the standards they achieve at age 11 are usually a little higher than average. Nearly all are of White British heritage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. Approximately 10% of students have been identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities, including 1% with Statements of Special Educational Needs. Both figures are below the national average, though they were closer to average for students taking GCSEs in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Freman College is an effective school that has made significant improvements in the last two years. This judgement is one shared by the college based on its effective self-evaluation. It provides good value for money and has the capacity for further improvement. The present headteacher took up her post in September 2004 and, with the effective support of her senior team, has had a strong impact on the college. Staff, parents, students and governors have all been impressed with the changes brought about. College leaders and governors share a vision which includes developing a more rigorous approach to raising standards while maintaining the college's historic strength of strong care and support. Consequently, students' personal development and well-being continue to be good and their behaviour is outstanding. The head's success in securing staff support for a significant change in the culture of the college is a measure of her effective leadership. The college has collaborated well with its partner middle schools to achieve joint specialist status as a Humanities College, with financial support drawn mainly from parents. The specialist status has been a catalyst for a number of changes that include a greater degree of accountability of heads of department and class teachers; a more intense focus on the quality of teaching and learning; and closer monitoring of students' progress. An effective programme of lesson observation is leading to a shared sense of purpose at middle-manager level. As a result, there have been improvements in teaching, learning and achievement, all of which are now good. Standards are above average in both key stages and in the sixth form. Nevertheless, a few inconsistencies remain, notably in marking and in lesson planning, where the different needs of learners are not always explicitly considered. The monitoring of this is not robust. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is adequate but will still be relatively limited after planned new courses begin in September 2006. The college has effective systems for tracking students' progress, which have enabled the college to direct its support to those most at risk of underachievement. Care, support and guidance are good. The college works effectively with other agencies to support vulnerable students.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the college that sixth-form provision is good. It was not possible to observe sixth-form lessons during the examination period, but inspectors were able to confirm the validity of the college's judgement that teaching and learning are effective in the sixth form through observation of the same teachers with other year groups and by reference to examination results. Individual students make good progress and achieve standards that are good overall. Students praise the quality of provision and feel that they are taught well; they value their college and are good role models for younger students. The curriculum effectively meets the needs of students who receive good support from the sixth-form leadership team and enjoy the many opportunities available to participate in enrichment activities. Some sixth-form students were critical of the careers and option choice guidance they received but the college

has made improvements to guidance, both for initial course choices and subsequent further or higher education course selection. Leadership of the sixth form is good, with a focus on raising standards and securing progress for all. Overall, the sixth form provides good value for money

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of marking and the way in which lesson plans address the variety of learning needs so that both are consistently good. - Develop a secure system for monitoring the effectiveness of marking and the extent to which planning addresses a variety of needs. - Further enhance the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of students who are not strongly motivated by a standard GCSE programme, and ensure that sufficient time is given for religious education (RE) in Key Stage 4.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good overall. Students make good progress in the great majority of lessons because of good and sometimes outstanding teaching. The college sets challenging targets and usually achieves them. The college's assessment records provide secure evidence that achievement has improved in the past year. Because few other schools transfer students at age 13, it is not possible to make a direct comparison with national progress data. However, the college works closely with its two middle school partners and the progress made by students between ages 11 and 16 is now better than in the majority of secondary schools nationally. Progress is good and improving in English and is even better in mathematics. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls, or among different minority ethnic groups. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress against the targets in their individual education plans and achieve as well as other students. Students attain above average standards at age 14 and, in most years, at age 16. However, standards at age 16 fell below the normal levels in 2005 after a significant number of students transferred from another school part way through Year 10, disrupting their schooling. For this year group, test results at age 11 had been average. Standards in the sixth form are above average. GCE AS level pass rates are well above average and nearly all students who complete the course pass their A levels. Grades are well above average at AS and above average at A level. Most students' A level grades are better than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results and an assumption of average progress. A few students enter intermediate level vocational qualifications and pass rates are above the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students enjoy their education; they respect their peers, teachers and other adults and this promotes harmony across the college. Students feel safe and free from discrimination. They

speak with confidence about their own fitness levels and healthy eating habits. The student council tackles issues raised by students, including the provision of healthy food. Students take increasing responsibility for their own learning and setting personal targets, but not consistently in all subjects. The vertical tutor system, in which each tutor group contains students of all ages, builds very effective relationships and has an outstanding impact on students' positive attitudes. All students quickly make very good relationships and their self-confidence flourishes. For an upper school, attendance is good. This is because attendance and punctuality are rigorously monitored and effective action is taken. Students' behaviour in class and around the college is excellent. As a result, there has been a significant drop in exclusions. Students develop good workplace skills, not least in subjects like drama, art and music where group work, problem solving and analysis of each other's work encourages students to think creatively. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Students understand right from wrong and fair play. Spiritual development has improved since the previous inspection because students have more opportunities for reflection. There is a good focus on contemporary moral and social issues through RE. Students engage in charity work such as the 'fill a shoebox' support for developing countries. They learn about other faiths but have limited experience of the multicultural nature of their country.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Responding to the leadership of senior staff, teachers have worked hard to develop the range of teaching strategies employed in lessons and make use of prior attainment data to monitor student progress and promote achievement. These changes have had a positive effect on the quality of learning, with increasing impact as they become routine practice for all staff. A significant majority of lessons are good or better. High quality learning is supported by the teachers' good subject knowledge, good relationships between staff and students, and carefully planned lessons that meet the needs of all learners. In the outstanding lessons students are prompted to reflect and think in depth about principles and ideas. For example, in a Year 9 RE lesson, an insightful and engaging classroom discussion followed from the stimulus: 'Is death a comma or a full stop'. The very best teaching also provides clear guidance to students about how good their work is and how to secure further improvement. This was demonstrated well in a languages lesson in which students learned how they could improve by answering in whole sentences rather than single words. In the minority of less effective lessons the pace of learning was slower. Students were not sufficiently clear about the purpose of the lesson and the work was too easy for some students and too hard for others. Marking was inconsistent and did not always give effective guidance on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory; it provides opportunities for most learners to experience success and to secure progress. A traditional academic programme of study in Years 10 and 11 is enriched by a limited number of vocational options but not enough to meet the needs of all students. Recognising this, the college is introducing new vocational courses in September 2006 and is exploring the possibility of linking with a neighbouring school to enhance provision. Provision for RE and information and communication technology across the curriculum has improved since the last inspection and now meets statutory requirements. In Key Stage 4, the provision of personal, social, health, citizenship and RE centres is concentrated into five 'special' days each year when the normal timetable is suspended and alternative activities are organised. Religious education is therefore provided for all students but there is insufficient time to adequately cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Work-related learning includes a week of work experience during Year 10 and work-related activities on the special days. The college is using its specialist status to improve the consistency of classroom practice and to provide additional learning resources. The college has an extensive range of extracurricular activities on offer for students, particularly so in music, drama and sport. Students much appreciate these opportunities which contribute effectively to their personal development, enjoyment and achievement. Parents value the provision for gifted and talented students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for students are good overall. The vertical tutor system and other significant strengths in care contribute to students' learning and well-being. The college has robust vetting procedures for adults with access to students. Rigorous systems are in place for child protection, including regular training updates for all staff. Liaison with external agencies is good. There are good systems for teachers and managers to track students' progress and identify where intervention is needed. However, students are not always involved in the tracking to enable them to take full responsibility for their own learning. The quality of marking is inconsistent. In a minority of cases students are not sufficiently clear about how to improve. The provision for course and career information is satisfactory and improving, with information available in the library and through the Connexions service. There are effective and welcoming transition arrangements at Year 9. The college has good screening procedures to identify students with special educational needs and liaises effectively with the middle schools. This leads to clear and accessible individual education plans. Learning support assistants plan effectively but their recording procedures are informal. Parents' and students' views of their progress are increasingly included when plans are reviewed

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the college are good. Leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the college well, taking into account the views of parents, students, governors and other interested groups. The head and her senior team have developed an effective improvement plan introducing a more rigorous approach to improvement. Effective management arrangements have led to greater accountability of heads of department for the quality of teaching and the standards achieved in their subjects. Pastoral leaders are similarly accountable for students in their care. This significant change in culture has been achieved without losing the college's traditional strengths which are embodied in the distinctive tutorial arrangements and contribute substantially to the school's capacity to improve further. The monitoring of teaching is now well established and the most effective teachers are asked to share their expertise. Monitoring is also used effectively to guide the professional development programme. Some forms of monitoring need further development. For example, senior managers accept that they have not ensured that students have equal access to effective marking and to work that meets their different needs. In other ways the college demonstrates its commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities. It monitors the performance of all students and makes special arrangements for inclusion, such as the 'alternative curriculum' in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form recruitment policy. Building modifications have made the college accessible to non-ambulant students. The college runs smoothly and manages its finances well. Workforce reform has brought in additional expertise in financial control, risk management and premises management and these areas are developing well. Governance is good because the governing body is well informed about the key issues within the college. Governors have played a significant role in encouraging the college to adopt a less insular approach and they are not afraid to ask searching questions, for example, in relation to examination results or the provision for RE.

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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?	2	2
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	

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	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	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?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
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 are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

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

As you know, your college was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. However, first, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your cooperation and assistance during our visit. We appreciated your comments and opinions. You told us how much you like your college. The college has a really good atmosphere and we were delighted by your excellent attitudes and behaviour. The unusual mixed-age tutor groups are a great strength of the college, helping you to grow into confident and considerate young people. We think that your college gives you a good education and that the college leaders know how to make it even better. You are fortunate to have a good headteacher and very committed staff. The college has collaborated well with its partner middle schools to achieve joint specialist status as a Humanities College. The specialist status has been a catalyst for change. There is a more intense focus on the quality of teaching and learning and closer monitoring of your progress. We found a few areas for the college to improve. We have asked the college to - make sure that marking is consistently good, so you will know how to improve - make sure that all lessons cater for students working at different levels - improve the range of courses in Key Stage 4 to include more alternatives to traditional GCSEs. We wish you and the school staff well in the future.