



Samuel Whitbread Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109670
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288470
Inspection dates 13–14 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Godwood

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	Community College address	Shefford Road Clifton, Shefford Bedfordshire SG17 5QS
School category	Community	Telephone number	01462 629900
Age range of pupils	13–19	Fax number	01462 629901
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair	Mr R Harrold
Number on roll (community College)	1540	Principal	Mr R Robson
Number on roll (6th form)	359		
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous community College inspection	19 March 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
13–19	13–14 November 2006	288470

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the community College

The college has grown in recent years and is larger than average, as is its sixth form. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is broadly average. The college has a centre for students with Asperger's Syndrome and runs an on-site nursery. It is a specialist engineering college and a training school. The college had a new principal in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the community College

Grade: 3

The college is satisfactory with good features. It is improving and has good capacity for further improvement. It has a good atmosphere that students enjoy. They get on well with one another and with staff. Their personal development and well-being are good as a result of good care and guidance. Achievement and teaching are satisfactory overall, but the quality varies too much between subjects.

However, standards are rising. Improvements over the past year in monitoring students' progress and focusing on areas of greatest need have already had a marked impact. Leadership and management are satisfactory and are well placed to improve rapidly. The new principal has a well judged programme to improve the quality of management throughout the college. Several parents commented on improvements they had seen since his appointment. However, the planned new programme is not fully in place. Current procedures for checking how well things are going and planning improvements are not sufficiently rigorous or focused on the desired outcomes for students.

Achievement in the main school is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average and improved significantly last year. GCSE results in 2005 were average overall but below average for the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades. There was considerable variation between subjects. Over the past year the college has focused strongly on raising GCSE standards, especially for students on the C/D borderline. As a result, the proportion of A* to C grades rose significantly in 2006. Students with learning difficulties make good progress, but the proportion who gain A* and A grades remains below average. There is still too much inconsistency in subject performance, and the core subjects of English, mathematics and science lag behind some others.

The inconsistencies in subject performance are linked to variations in the quality of teaching. There are many good and some outstanding lessons, but teaching is satisfactory overall because some lessons lack interest and challenge. In many lessons, not enough is expected of the higher attaining students. Students are well informed about their examination targets and receive regular feedback, but the quality of guidance they receive from teachers varies.

The range of courses is satisfactory, but does not include enough vocational courses to meet the needs of all students. Students are taught effectively how to stay safe and healthy. Additional support for students with learning difficulties is very good. The provision for gifted and talented students is satisfactory but less well developed. Extra-curricular activities are good, especially in sport and the arts. Engineering status has a beneficial impact on the college's ethos and curriculum. Students enjoy the benefits of additional technology in their learning and an engineering approach to some subjects. The superb new building has hugely improved the learning environment and is a visible symbol of an improving college.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The college has a good sixth form. Good teaching enables students to achieve well and gain above average results. Staff have high expectations and challenge students in well planned lessons. They effectively develop students' ability to learn independently. Students enjoy professional relationships with staff and receive excellent guidance and support. Students' personal development is outstanding through many opportunities to take responsibility in the college and the community. The dynamic leadership team ensures that areas for development are identified and plans are implemented to make the necessary improvements.

What the community College should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good teaching by ensuring that lessons are effectively focused on promoting students' learning.
- Raise teachers' expectations of higher attaining students.
- Extend the curriculum so that it includes more vocational courses and more fully meets the needs of all students.
- Ensure that self-evaluation and planning are rigorous and focused on raising students' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. When students join the college in Year 9, their attainment is broadly average. They make satisfactory progress and achieve average results in Year 9 tests. The 2005 results were above average in science and below average in English. Girls and boys made similar progress. Results in 2006 stayed broadly the same. Students' progress was better in mathematics and science than in English.

GCSE results in 2005 were average overall. Higher attaining students made less progress than other students. As a result, the pass rate at A* to C was below average but the pass rate at A* to G was above average. Students with learning difficulties made good progress. Progress in English was exceptionally low. Results in 2006 improved significantly, particularly in the number of students gaining five or more A* to C grades. English results also improved significantly. The college met its targets, including its engineering college target.

There remained, however, considerable variation between subjects, and the proportion of students who gained A* or A grades remained below average. Students' progress was satisfactory overall.

In the sixth form, the great majority of students complete their courses. The A-level point score per subject is broadly average, but A-level results are above average overall because students take more subjects than is usually the case. Students make good

progress in relation to their starting points. Results are improving, particularly in AS-level and intermediate vocational courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The large majority of students enjoy college and are keen to learn, especially when lessons are interesting and the teaching is of a high standard. Sixth form students have especially positive attitudes and are encouraged to be independent learners. Attendance is above average.

Behaviour is good. Students fully understand the discipline procedures but report that teachers do not always implement them consistently. Students feel safe in school. The college has raised awareness of bullying and, as a result, instances are rare and are dealt with effectively.

Students are effectively encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through a good range of sports activities and the healthy meals that have been introduced this year. The college council is active and students feel that it enables them to have an impact on 'making learning better'. They also contribute to the college community through year group working parties. Sixth form students have many opportunities to support younger students, for example as peer mentors, and are regularly involved in community service. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory. They have some lessons in financial capability and most undertake work experience.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the main school. Lessons are often good and sometimes outstanding, but the quality of teaching is not consistent.

Teachers generally plan thoroughly, and often deliver interesting, well structured lessons. In some lessons, however, the pace is too slow, and this reduces students' interest. Digital projectors are sometimes used well to add impact to teachers' presentations. Teachers outline the aims of the lesson, but these are not always focused sufficiently on what students will learn, or used to help students monitor their own progress. Higher attaining students are not challenged sufficiently to work to their full capacity. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make good progress.

Marking is variable. Some provides constructive comments that support learning well, but other marking is little more than ticks. Students at all stages are involved in assessing their own learning. They have regular guidance on how to improve, although this varies in how specific and helpful it is.

In the sixth form, students are effectively encouraged to study with increasing independence and the quality of teaching and marking is more consistently good. As a result, learning is good also.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Students have a wide range of GCSE options, but there are too few vocational courses to meet the needs of all students. There are, however, good arrangements for a small number of students to follow a work related course that includes college and work experience. Sixth form students have a good choice of A-level and intermediate vocational courses. Students' personal development is enhanced by a well-planned programme in the main school and general studies in the sixth form.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and the arts, and additional study support. Provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. There are increasing opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Engineering college status has broadened the design and technology programme and strengthened the performing arts. Improved facilities have benefited students' learning in science and other subjects. Links with the community have grown as a result of engineering status and are used well to enhance learning through visits and special events. Good liaison with the middle schools helps to smooth the transition for new students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Procedures for child protection and ensuring safety in school are clear and robust. Good links with external agencies ensure that vulnerable students receive additional help. Learners who are at risk are identified early and given individual programmes to increase their achievement.

There are good procedures for tracking how well students are doing and setting them individual targets. Parents are very pleased with the target setting and consultation sessions. However, students in the main school feel that the quality of guidance from different teachers varies and is not always specific enough to be helpful. Sixth form

students are well supported by their form tutors and have a clear understanding of how to achieve their challenging targets.

Students are guided well in choosing GCSE and sixth form courses. Individual support and guidance in the sixth form are very good, including advice on careers and university entrance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory, but improving in many aspects. Changes in leadership at several levels provide a powerful catalyst for the next stage of development. The new principal has a good understanding of the college and a clear vision of improved management practice that is focused on raising achievement. He is building on the college's successes: recognising its pastoral strengths while acknowledging that more should be expected of students academically. He is well supported by the senior leadership team, whose roles have been clarified, and by the newly appointed heads of faculty, who have a mandate to improve learning and students' achievement.

Procedures for self-evaluation and planning are satisfactory, and are in the process of being improved. The college recognises that current improvement plans are not sufficiently focused on how better teaching can benefit students' learning and achievement. This has led to the variations in subject performance. Departmental self-evaluation has recently been made more rigorous and a tighter process of review is being introduced to improve the lower-performing subjects. Recent initiatives are starting to benefit learning but have not been in place for long enough to ensure sustained improvement. The college's role as a training school is starting to have a greater influence on classroom practice and is well placed to support the drive to raise achievement.

In the sixth form, good leadership and management of subjects ensure consistently good teaching and outstanding guidance for students.

The governing body has a firm grasp of resource deployment and has played an important role in planning the new building. Governors have a developing understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses, but are not involved sufficiently in shaping its long-term direction.

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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?	3	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	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	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	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?	3	2
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 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

15 November 2006

Dear Students

Samuel Whitbread Community College, Shefford Road, Clifton, Shefford. SG17 5QS

Thank you for your help when we visited the college recently. We enjoyed talking with you and visiting your lessons and other activities. Many of you told us that you enjoy college because it is friendly and you are treated with respect. We agree that you are well cared for and develop well into young adults. Your behaviour and attendance are good. Sixth form students have particularly good opportunities to take responsibility and help others.

You told us that the quality of teaching varies, and that is what we found. Some lessons are very good, but others do not interest or challenge you enough. You are well informed about your targets, but the guidance on how to meet them also varies. We have asked the college to make the teaching more consistent. In the sixth form, teaching and guidance are more consistently good and students improve their skills in learning independently.

The college has improved over the past year and is continuing to improve. The new building and the engineering college have improved the facilities. In addition, senior staff are working hard to improve the achievement of all students. GCSE results improved a lot last year, particularly the percentage gaining five or more A* to C grades. Students with learning difficulties are very well supported and make good progress. However, there is too much variation between results in different subjects and not enough is expected of the most able students. We have asked the college to improve these aspects. We have also asked the college to make sure that the planning teachers do is well focused on activities that will help your learning. Sixth form students make good progress.

You have a good range of additional activities, especially in sport and the arts, and are guided well in choosing your options. There is a good range of GCSE courses to choose from, but not enough vocational courses. We have asked the college to extend these. The sixth form offers a good range of courses.

We are confident that the college will continue to improve. You can help by setting your sights high and making sure that you know exactly what you need to work on to meet your targets. We wish you the very best with that.

Yours sincerely

John Godwood (Lead inspector)