

# Helston Community College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112043
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cornwall
<b>Inspection number</b>	289157
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30–31 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Humphries HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1625
6th form	358
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Graham Vallender
<b>Headteacher</b>	Patrick McGovern
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2002
<b>School address</b>	Church Hill Helston TR13 8NR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01326 572685
<b>Fax number</b>	01326 572183

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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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

Helston Community College is a very large specialist technology school which is located on two sites approximately a quarter of a mile apart. The college draws students from an extensive rural catchment area. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average, although the area served by the college is not prosperous. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups or with a first language other than English are very low. The college was successfully reassessed for the Investors in People award in November 2007.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Helston Community College is a good and improving school. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. The college motto, 'Excellence and enjoyment with no-one left behind' captures the headteacher's determination to ensure that all students are valued, supported and encouraged to succeed. One parent, writing about her son, explained how the college 'has given him confidence and boosted his self-esteem, enabling him to make good progress'. Students' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy learning and their attendance is outstanding. The great majority of students behave well and treat each other with care and respect. They are eager to take responsibility and develop leadership skills, but opportunities to do this are underdeveloped. Teaching is good overall. It is mostly purposeful and imaginative, and students respond enthusiastically. Overall, they make good progress and the standards they reach are above average. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics is well above average. The most able students make rapid progress when lessons are stimulating and intellectually demanding, but they are not always sufficiently stretched and too few obtain the highest grades in GCSE subjects at age 16. The curriculum is good and outstanding vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 greatly enhance opportunities for students to acquire work-based skills and qualifications. An impressive array of support services is well focused on the needs of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are excellent systems to track students' progress and tackle any signs of underachievement. The headteacher has established a vibrant and forward-thinking college where an unyielding determination to raise achievement is complemented by a highly inclusive atmosphere in which individual staff and students are valued and encouraged. The governors make an incisive contribution to strategic planning and self-evaluation: they are a key factor in the college's good capacity for further improvement. Outstanding partnerships with outside organisations and imaginative use of the college's specialist status greatly enhance the quality of provision. One parent aptly summarised the key strengths of the college: 'It is very progressive in its thinking. The college is well led and the staff are friendly and supportive, both with academic and pastoral issues. My son enjoys college and is making good progress.'

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The sixth form is increasingly effective, and while it does not share all of the strengths of the main college, its overall effectiveness is good. Recent changes in leadership and management have led to improvements in a number of areas, although some of these are only just beginning to have an impact. Students make good progress, particularly on vocational courses, and the standards they reach are above average. Teaching is good overall and is most effective when students are encouraged to think critically about the topic they are studying. The sixth form curriculum is good. Comparatively little time is allocated for personal development, but an extensive range of academic and vocational courses is well matched with students' learning needs and aspirations. Care, guidance and support are good. A system for tracking students' progress mirrors the exemplary practice in the main college, but has not been in place long enough to have an impact on achievement. Students' personal development is good, although sixth formers are sometimes reluctant to engage with younger students and their contribution to the wider life of the college is limited.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of the most able students by ensuring that high expectations and challenging teaching are established more consistently across the college.
- Provide greater opportunities for students, particularly sixth formers, to take responsibility and participate more actively in the life of the college.

## Achievement and standards

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The attainment of students on entry to the college is broadly average, although in some years it is slightly higher than this. In Years 7 to 9, students make good progress overall so that the standards they reach at age 14 are above average. However, there are marked variations between subjects. In mathematics and science there has been an upward trend in performance over recent years. The most recent national test results in mathematics at age 14 are above average and performance in science is particularly strong, with test results which are well above average. Students do not perform so well in English. The college is working hard to tackle this through a sharper focus on developing the skills that students need to succeed in the national tests. This is beginning to have an impact: the most recent results show a significant improvement and are slightly above average. Students continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 so that their results in GCSE examinations at age 16 are above average. There is consistently strong performance in English and mathematics and the college has been extremely successful in increasing the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades including these subjects: this has risen substantially in recent years and is now well above average. While the most able students achieve GCSE results which are well above average, too few attain the highest grades across the range of subjects that they are studying. Sixth form students continue to make good progress. While there are variations between subjects, A-level examination results are above average and students' performance on vocational courses is particularly strong, with very high course completion rates. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive high quality support and benefit from a curriculum which is very well matched with their needs. Vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 are particularly successful in enabling students who might struggle to succeed on examination courses to achieve a range of valuable personal and work-related skills.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students have positive attitudes towards the college and want to do well. They enjoy learning, particularly when lessons include a range of different activities. Most are able to build friendly and supportive relationships with each other and with college staff. There are highly effective strategies for managing the more challenging behaviour of a small number of students and the number of exclusions is extremely small for a college of this size. Students understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle: large numbers participate in sporting activities and meals in the canteen, which features good quality local ingredients, are increasingly popular. The college is very successful in helping students to understand the potential dangers faced by young people in their lives outside college. Most students act safely and responsibly in college, showing good awareness of specific hazards in subjects such as design and technology

and construction. Students enjoy discussing moral and social issues and opportunities for quiet reflection, particularly in the ethics course in Years 10 and 11. Their understanding of multicultural issues is less well developed. Many students participate enthusiastically in charity fund-raising and community events. There is an active college council and the students involved enjoy participating in discussion and decision making. Some Year 11 students take on additional responsibility as prefects and some sixth formers support specific initiatives in the main college, for example, by helping with the 'word warriors' reading programme. More generally, though, there are limited opportunities for a wider range of students, particularly sixth formers, to take responsibility and contribute more actively to the life of the college. Students are very well prepared for the world of work or continuing education. The high priority given to English and mathematics at GCSE ensures that most students develop very good literacy and numeracy skills and are well placed for further study. Those following vocational courses acquire valuable workplace skills which are very well matched with the needs of the local economy.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

An increasingly sharp focus on the quality of teaching and learning is underpinned by rigorous self-evaluation and supported by an extensive programme of professional development and sharing of good practice. This ensures that teaching and learning are continually improving. Lessons are planned well and students are clear about what they are expected to learn. Teachers know their students well and classroom relationships are good. In most lessons there is an emphasis on active learning, with varied activities and opportunities for independent learning and group work. Students enjoy these lessons, take pride in their work and have the confidence to participate fully. They thrive on activities that capture and keep their interest, but do less well when teachers provide them with fewer opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. The most able students make rapid progress when expectations are high and teaching is challenging; there are examples of very good practice, but this is not yet sufficiently well established across the college. The college is making increasingly effective use of assessment information to inform teaching and monitor students' progress. Most students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and know what they need to do to improve their work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The college has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. While this meets the current statutory requirements, the college recognises that there is not enough emphasis on students' personal development and the acquisition of key learning skills. There are well-conceived plans to tackle this by implementing a new curriculum structure in September 2008. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 includes an imaginative blend of academic and vocational courses. The college recognises that it does not yet provide sufficient vocational opportunities for more-able students. However, other aspects of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 are outstanding. There is a wide range of GCSE subjects and vocational courses such as construction and health and beauty are very well matched with students' learning needs. These courses are often highly effective in motivating students who might otherwise struggle to

achieve worthwhile skills or qualifications. There is an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, with those in sport and music being particularly popular. The Helston College Jazz Orchestra has won national acclaim. Students benefit greatly from the college's specialist status, particularly through the use of interactive technology to support teaching and learning. Videoconferencing is now well established and there are imaginative plans to introduce mobile learning devices for some students. Innovative projects such as energy saving through harnessing wind power have achieved national recognition.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The college is justifiably proud of the very high quality care, guidance and support that it provides for students. A very well-designed and extremely effective computerbased tracking system enables all staff to monitor students' academic progress. Underachievement is identified at an early stage and tackled quickly and effectively. Students have access to their own personal data from the college intranet, and consequently they have a very clear view about their overall progress and targets for improvement. These are discussed with teachers in regular individual tutorials. This exemplary practice has recently been introduced in the sixth form, but has not been in place for long enough to have had a significant impact. Students receive very good guidance when they choose the courses they will follow in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and when they have to make decisions about employment or higher education. Support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. The college has established an extremely comprehensive support network which is very effective in integrating the work of its own highly committed staff with the specialist expertise of outside agencies and organisations. Some of this work is innovative, for example, Taiko Japanese drumming lessons to help students who need support with anger management. Students with specific literacy difficulties benefit from well-designed programmes focussing on key areas such as reading recovery and dyslexia. There are well-developed systems for managing risk assessment and broader health and safety issues. Comprehensive arrangements for child protection are in place and students are confident about talking to a member of staff if they feel unhappy or anxious.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The headteacher has a clear vision for the college, underpinned by a deep sense of social justice. His skilful and determined leadership is a key factor in the success of the college. He has successfully established an effective leadership structure with a productive balance of autonomy and accountability, supported by extensive training and development of staff at all levels. Senior and middle leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the need to evaluate the impact of their provision on student outcomes. They willingly accept responsibility for their actions. There is a clear link between their annual reviews and their priorities and plans for the future. Examples of recent actions with a positive impact include raising standards in mathematics and making better use of data to evaluate students' progress and to tackle underachievement. There is no element of complacency. Targets are set to place the college in the top performing

quarter of schools nationally; when these are exceeded more ambitious targets are set. The governing body makes an outstanding contribution to the development of the college. It has produced a valuable 'toolkit' which supports all governors to take a full role. Their involvement in shaping strategic priorities and self-evaluation is exemplary. The college recognises the importance of its work in a large rural community, far from other towns and cities. There are ambitious plans to develop learning opportunities across the area in collaboration with other providers. Highly productive partnerships with outside agencies and organisations enhance the quality of the college's work. The college is well regarded by a large majority of parents, but recognises the need to improve the way it seeks and acts on their views and those of students. There are plans to improve this aspect of its work in the year ahead. Leadership of the sixth form has been through a period of change. Since September, an assistant headteacher has taken over the role of head of sixth form, supported by a course director. They are beginning to drive through improvements, often building on initiatives that have been successful in the main part of the college, although some of these are at an early stage of implementation.



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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

### 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	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

- 1 February 2008 Dear Students Inspection of Helston Community College, Helston TR13 8NR  
The inspection team enjoyed listening to your views when your college was inspected on 30 and 31 January 2008. Many of your parents and carers completed a questionnaire to let us know how they felt about the college. I hope you will talk to them about the inspection report because it explains what the college does well and how it can become even better. Helston Community College is a good and improving school. Some of its work is outstanding. The curriculum is enhanced by very effective use of the college's specialist status and vocational courses provide an excellent alternative to examination subjects for many students. There are very good systems to track your progress and the college is quick to tackle underachievement. The college provides you with excellent care and support, often drawing very effectively on the expertise of outside organisations. Teachers know you well and want you to succeed. These things combine to help you make good progress and the academic standards that you reach are above average. Most of you behave well and act safely and responsibly. When lessons are interesting you enjoy learning and your attendance is excellent. You are very well prepared for the world of work or continuing education. The college is well led. The headteacher, college staff and governing body work together very well as a team. They are highly committed to ensuring that all of you achieve as well as you can. They also have a very clear understanding of the college's strengths and are determined to make it even more effective. There are two areas that we have asked them to focus on:
  - The most able students do well, but do not always achieve the very highest examination grades. We have asked the college to make sure that these students are more consistently stretched in lessons so that they make more rapid progress. This group of students can help by rising to the challenges they are set!
  - While you develop good social skills, there are too few opportunities for students, particularly sixth formers, to develop these further by taking on responsibility and playing a more active part in the life of the college. You can help by responding positively when you are offered these opportunities. This is important because the skills you acquire will help you in life beyond the college. I wish you all the best for the future. Yours sincerely David Humphries, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Annex B**

1 February 2008

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I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely  
David Humphries, Her Majesty's Inspector