



Exmouth Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113504
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289656
Inspection dates 27–28 September 2006
Reporting inspector Anne Looney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Gipsy Lane
School category	Community		Exmouth
Age range of pupils	11–18		EX8 3AF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01395 264761
Number on roll (school)	2514	Fax number	01395 225355
Number on roll (6th form)	389	Chair	E Lee
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Principal	A K Alexander
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	27–28 September 2006	289656

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Exmouth Community College is an extremely large split-site college and is the only secondary school in this expanding seaside town. A large percentage of learners stay on into the sixth form, which educates over 350 students. Over the last few years, new buildings and a bridge linking the two sites have improved the college environment considerably. Most of the students are from White British backgrounds and very few have English as an additional language. When they enter the college their attainment is broadly average. The college has had specialist school status in mathematics and computing for two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the college is good. Under the leadership of the principal and supported by a well-informed governing body and a committed senior leadership team, the college has made great strides over the last four years. This view of improvement is endorsed by a large number of parents. One wrote: 'The principal has made the school so much better' and another reinforced that by stating that the 'school has developed a good positive atmosphere. The facilities are constantly being improved to allow students as well as teachers to produce better results.'

The development of a culture in which expectations of behaviour and attitudes have been raised has laid the foundations for the improvement in achievement. There has been a marked improvement in behaviour so that there are now fewer permanent exclusions. Attendance has improved so that it is now above average and students' response to their learning is more positive. This is recognised particularly by students in Year 11 and above, who have seen the impact of the change in culture.

The changes to the environment have ensured a higher level of safety for the students as they move around this large site. Students respond well to the college's encouragement to lead a healthy lifestyle, and to help others through charity work. Their economic understanding is developed well through links with the town's business community.

There has been a significant increase in results over the last three years and students' progress, which was inadequate three years ago, is now good throughout the college. The college has monitored students' progress over those three years, intervening where necessary and going that extra mile to give the students the help, encouragement and support they need to be successful. Monitoring of progress has been linked closely to minimum target grades, which has, in the recent past, ensured satisfactory progress. The college has recently started to set more challenging targets. For those students who are due to sit GCSEs next year, targets are more challenging and progress throughout both key stages is now good.

Teaching and learning have improved and are now good. To make teaching better and more consistent, the college is aware of the priorities to further improve assessment and for sharper target setting when giving feedback to students. The leadership team has a secure picture of the quality of teaching. However, the involvement of middle managers in the monitoring and evaluation and subsequent development of subject teachers is inconsistent.

Central to the improvement in both attitudes and achievement is the college's commitment to inclusion. The outstanding breadth of curriculum it provides ensures that students of all ages, who might otherwise be disaffected, remain in full-time education. The college targets its finances well to support the promotion of an inclusive provision.

The college has exploited its specialist school status well, ensuring that the impact has extended beyond the two specialisms. In particular, the emphasis on improving

the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and developing the ICT skills of both students and teachers has led to a richer and more varied learning experience for students.

Based on a proven track record over the last few years and the accurate self- knowledge in the improvement plan, the college has demonstrated a good capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is equally good. Management and leadership have secured a breadth of curricular provision which, together with good teaching, has allowed all students to achieve well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set consistently challenging targets for students to increase the rate of improvement.
- Ensure a consistent high quality of feedback on students' work.
- Iron out the inconsistencies in the way subject leaders monitor and improve the performance of their departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students join the college having attained average results overall in their Year 6 national tests. During Years 7 to Year 9 they make good progress, so much so that when they take their tests at the end of Year 9, they achieve above- average standards. These above-average standards are now being reached by the current Year 11 as the benefits of improved teaching and learning are being seen in their examinations and college assessments and as their progress is more closely monitored by senior leadership. As a result, students now make good progress throughout the college. Results have risen significantly over the last three years because the leadership of the college has maintained a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Older students told inspectors how much things have changed and they praised the expectations that their teachers have of them. One student told inspectors: 'This school has helped me achieve more than I ever thought I would.'

Standards reached in examinations in the sixth form are average, reflecting the broad range of ability of students who are enrolled. Students' progress on both academic and on other courses is equally good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development throughout the college is good. They speak very positively about their college. They feel safe and well cared for. Behaviour is good around the college and in lessons. Although there are a very large number of students, movement between lessons, between sites, and in the breaks is both orderly and calm. Attendance has improved considerably in the last two years. It is now above the national average. The exclusion rate is rapidly reducing.

Students' positive attitudes are reflected in their obvious enjoyment of their college experience and in the way they work in lessons. Relationships between peers and with teachers are strong. Bullying is rare and students are adamant that it is effectively dealt with. They appreciate the work of the on-site counsellors and youth workers.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They develop good spiritual and moral awareness through their personal, social and health education programme, in religious education, assemblies, tutorial time and through effective citizenship education. Students gain a good awareness of global, moral, cultural and social issues, in particular, through geography, music, art, drama and visiting speakers.

Social development is good. Students' participation in the exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular clubs and sports on offer is very high. They contribute well to fund-raising and charitable activities. The college council is very effective and has contributed to many of the recent college policies. Students appreciate, and take advantage of, the opportunity to share their ideas through the open forum on the intranet site.

Students are generally responding well to the college's exhortation to lead a healthy lifestyle. Sporting activities are popular and students are making good use of the new eating areas around the college, where the fare on offer has become healthier. There are still some students who remain to be convinced. As one student said: 'The food is almost too healthy!' All students effectively develop their business awareness and enterprise skills through work experience, industry days and Young Enterprise, and are well prepared for the world of work.

In the sixth form, the emphasis on the development of the whole person as someone who cares for others both in the college and wider communities is very clearly appreciated by students. Students are encouraged to be confident and proud of their achievements, and they are.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good across the college. Teachers are committed and hardworking, have responded well to the college's drive to improve teaching and learning, and are receptive to professional development. They have good subject knowledge and are skilled in preparing students for examinations. Lessons are well planned and meet the needs of the learners well. Teachers elicit co-operative responses from students, who behave well in class and concentrate on tasks. Effective use is made of ICT across the college to enhance learning. Most lessons offer a variety of activities but a few are too didactic, keeping students listening passively or writing too much. This approach is not popular with students, who told inspectors that they needed to be involved and challenged. Opportunities for students to learn independently are variable. Assessment is well integrated into lessons and teachers are generally accurate in their assessments of their students. Teachers are efficient at monitoring progress through assessment of students' work and they give students valuable extra coaching. They have started developing peer assessment and more diagnostic feedback to students but the effectiveness varies from subject to subject and sometimes within subjects.

Students in the sixth form are ably supported by teachers, who provide the challenges required for them to learn well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The college graded the curriculum to be good. The inspectors, however, judge it to be outstanding throughout the college. The college's creative approach to curriculum development, striving to enhance provision year on year, has produced an excellent array of courses to meet the needs of all students. Economies of scale allow the college to run an extensive programme and make use of courses at a local college of further education. There is an enhancement curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the programme for gifted and talented students is exciting, encouraging them to achieve their potential. In Year 10 the open- options system allows students to choose academic or vocational options alongside the core curriculum and provides clear pathways of progression onto post-16 courses, where the range of courses is equally outstanding. The alternative curriculum is exemplary, maintaining the interest and commitment of students who might otherwise become disaffected. The college is in tune with the needs of local employers through its business partnership and responds effectively to the skills needs in the local economy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The college cares for students of all ages well. The environment is safe and students are encouraged to be healthy. The college provides a very supportive environment, encouraging students to take extra sessions to help their learning. Teaching assistants, for example, provide additional help with difficult coursework. Students who may be more vulnerable than others are identified by the college, with very clear systems put in place to provide them with support and help when needed.

Students are given very good advice at key points in their college career about subject and career options. The high retention rate in the sixth form is proof of the effectiveness of that advice. The college guides the students' academic progress, setting them targets throughout their studies. These targets, however, have not always been rigorous enough to ensure students make the best possible progress. Students in the sixth form believe that the consistency of target setting across subjects could be improved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management across the college are good. The principal's leadership is very strong and, with the support of an effective and knowledgeable governing body, he has set a clear direction for the college. The senior leadership team has worked well with all staff to establish a common purpose: the improvement of teaching and learning and better achievement for all students. The college's approach to inclusion is strong, as can be seen in the breadth of its provision and the fact that all learners achieve equally well.

There are clear links between the senior leaders and subject departments and examples of considerable improvements being brought about by close collaborative work. This best practice is not, however, being shared as well as it might be across the college.

The college has good systems in place to monitor the progress of the students against their target grades and levels. This has led to increasingly well-timed identification of underachievers. College targets for the present Year 11 are more ambitious and challenge them to aim higher.

The senior leadership team has monitored the teaching and learning in subject areas and has a secure and accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses. This has been formally and effectively completed through the performance management process and teachers whose performance is not consistently satisfactory are supported to improve. Observations carried out outside this process lack a clear focus and, as a result, development opportunities are lost. Not all heads of subjects play a sufficiently active role in monitoring the teaching of their departments.

Communications across this enormous site are effective and day-to-day management is good. The college manages the considerable turnover of its staff well and makes particularly good use of teaching assistants to free teachers to teach.

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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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
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	2	2
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?	1	1
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 to below 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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
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

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made about your college. Thank you for making us welcome, for always being so ready to help us find our way around your college and for taking the time to talk to us.

- We believe that Exmouth Community College is a good school.
- The college has made a lot of changes for the good in the last few years and helps you make progress by teaching you well and by providing you with an amazing amount of choice in subjects, courses and ways to learn.
- You make good use of the big choice of sporting and other after-college activities on offer and most of you are making an effort to live a healthy lifestyle.
- The principal and the other senior teachers lead the college well and have a clear idea of what the college does well and what needs to be made better.
- The overwhelming majority of you say that you enjoy your college and that you feel you are safe, well supported and well taught. Older students made it very clear to us how much they felt the college had improved since they started in Year 7.
- We thought that your behaviour was good and were impressed by the calm way you dealt with the size of the college site.
- Your college needs to:
 - make sure that you are assessed well, receive consistently good feedback and are set challenging targets
 - make sure that all the subject leaders find out exactly how good teaching is in their subjects.