



Wreake Valley Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 120267
Local Authority Leicestershire
Inspection number 291687
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Parkstone Road
School category	Community		Syston
Age range of pupils	11–18		Leicester LE7 1LY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0116 2641080
Number on roll (school)	1190	Fax number	0116 2641089
Number on roll (6th form)	358		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Peter Moorhead
		Headteacher	Helen McDermott
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	17–18 January 2007	291687

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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

Wreake Valley Community College was awarded specialist status as a Science College in September 2006. Students are drawn from Syston and surrounding villages, although a significant number also travel from outside the catchment area, including north Leicester. Numbers have increased since the last inspection and the college is oversubscribed. Students enter the high school at age 11 or the upper school at the age of 14 after attending other high schools.

The college's student population is diverse, reflecting the mixed catchment area. Moreover, there is significant variation between the two intakes. Many students, particularly those who start in Year 10, come from families that face social and educational disadvantages, although comparatively few claim free school meals. Most students are White British, although a higher than average proportion of older students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, including a significant number from families of Indian heritage. The proportion of students who have English as an additional language is above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Wreake Valley Community College is a popular school with obvious strengths. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The high school (Key Stage 3) is particularly successful because students' achievement is outstanding. The achievement of students in the upper school (Key Stage 4) and in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Achievement is therefore satisfactory overall. Results in end of Key Stage 3 tests are significantly higher than those seen nationally. Standards at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are broadly in line with national average figures. These results reflect students' excellent progress in the high school and satisfactory progress in the upper school and in the sixth form. However, the gap in the performance of boys and girls has widened in recent years. In Key Stage 4 too many boys do not achieve as well as they should.

The unevenness in standards across the college results from variation in the quality of its provision. The quality of teaching, and the resulting quality of learning, ranges from outstanding to inadequate. It is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is good. As a large school, it is able to offer a wide and varied range of subjects and enrichment activities. The college's specialism in science makes a positive impact on its provision and standards.

The college provides good care, guidance and support for its students, particularly at the two points of transition. The students' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance is good. The majority of students are well behaved, but the negative attitudes of a small number of students disrupt some lessons.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has effectively addressed the issues from the last inspection and has made satisfactory improvement. However, its notable developments and successes must be weighed against the decline in students' achievement at Key Stage 4. Self-evaluation is thorough, but the well established procedures for monitoring and review have not been sufficiently rigorous in rooting out weaknesses, and have not been an effective tool for improving achievement. Recent steps to make self-evaluation more rigorous are beginning to impact on students' progress and demonstrate that the college has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. The sixth form has grown steadily since the last inspection and retention rates into Years 12 and 13 are good. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with those seen nationally. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress. Achievement is satisfactory.

The sixth form curriculum has been strengthened since the last inspection. Students are offered a broad range of courses and also benefit from a range of enrichment opportunities, including sporting, social and work-related activities. Students enjoy

being in the sixth form and appreciate the support and guidance that they receive. Many students make a positive contribution to the college and the wider community through, for example, their work as mentors for younger students.

Sixth form teaching is satisfactory. Some lessons are good and even outstanding, although the college recognises that students are not always given sufficient opportunities to become independent learners. Leadership is satisfactory. However, evaluation of sixth form provision is not as rigorous as it needs to be to drive up standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of boys, particularly in Key Stage 4.
- Make better use of the existing systems for self-evaluation to improve the quality of learning, so that all students make at least satisfactory progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall. The standard of students' work when they start college in Year 7 or in Year 10 is broadly average. However, progress and achievement vary between key stages and between different groups of students. Students who join in Year 7 make excellent progress in the high school, whilst achievement in the upper school, and in the sixth form, is satisfactory. In general, girls make better progress than boys, particularly in Key Stage 4. Students from Indian heritage make significantly better progress than those from other ethnic groups. The science specialist subjects make a strong contribution to the college's overall standards of attainment.

Standards of attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have been significantly above average in recent years, regularly exceeding the college's targets. This represents outstanding achievement. In comparison, standards at GCSE are broadly average. Although the proportion of students who gained at least five higher grade GCSEs increased in 2006, the college narrowly missed its target. In general, students make expected rates of progress in Key Stage 4, but the college recognises that a significant number of students, particularly boys, do not achieve the results that they should. Achievement at Key Stage 4 has declined since the last inspection, primarily because of the widening gap in the performance of girls and boys.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. Given their starting points, students make expected progress in Years 12 and 13 and their achievement is satisfactory. There is variation between students' performance in different curriculum areas. There is strong achievement and standards are high in science. Outcomes are weaker in some humanities subjects. The college makes use of assessment information to set challenging targets. Student progress is systematically monitored, and this data indicates that standards at GCSE are set to rise this year. Some subjects make excellent use of prior attainment data to track individual progress and to support those students who are falling behind. However, the college's targeted intervention and support

strategies for underachieving students has not had sufficient impact on raising standards at GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Students enjoy college and attendance is good. The good relationships among students, and between students and adults, create a settled and positive climate. The maturity of the sixth-form students demonstrates that they are able to flourish socially. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most students behave very well and have positive attitudes to learning. However, some low level disruption and more challenging behaviour cause disruption in a few lessons when they are not effectively managed. The behaviour of the majority of students as they move around the college's narrow stairways and corridors is calm and considerate, although the boisterousness of some older boys is a concern for a few younger students.

Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and most appreciate the commitment of the college in offering healthy food choices and a good range of extra-curricular activities. Students feel safe. They report that bullying is uncommon and that staff deal effectively and quickly with any reported incidents. The college councils enable students to make a positive contribution to their own environment and the wider community. For example, they contribute to a programme of charitable activities, and the 'Safe Route' for cyclists along the Fosse Way has been developed in collaboration with external agencies. The development of workplace skills is good and is well supported by activities such as 'Enterprise Day' and Young Enterprise companies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Much of the teaching is good and some is outstanding, but the quality of learning is too variable. In general, lessons are carefully structured and effectively managed. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well and employ suitable resources to present students with a range of interesting learning activities. Good relationships between adults and students in most lessons ensure that students stay on task and work steadily.

In the most effective lessons teachers set a brisk pace by planning precisely to meet the different learning needs of all students. In these lessons good use is made of prior attainment data to set challenging work, and students are encouraged to learn through a variety of motivating tasks. Rapid progress is promoted when there is ongoing

assessment of learning through careful questioning, student self and peer evaluation, good plenary sessions and detailed and constructive marking. The promotion of independent learning is a strong feature of the best sixth-form teaching. The quality of students' learning is uneven and sometimes unsatisfactory when teaching is weaker. Some lessons do not present sufficient challenge, either because students are not effectively managed or because learning activities do not engage the whole class. This is most often the case when teachers spend too long talking and the majority of students listen passively. Lessons are disrupted when teachers do not deal effectively with challenging behaviour. Inadequate learning is linked with weak assessment of students' needs and progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and responds well to the needs of the students. Since the last inspection the college has taken suitable steps to adapt the upper school and sixth form curriculum by making it more flexible and by introducing different pathways for the students, particularly through vocational courses, some of which are taught at local further education colleges. The planning and development of the curriculum is thoughtful. For example, the college has enhanced the high school curriculum by including dance and drama to help develop students' confidence and self-esteem. There are good curriculum links with feeder primary schools.

The curriculum is enriched with a good range of clubs, sporting and musical activities, and a variety of local and overseas residential trips. These provide good opportunities for students to widen their skills and experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The level of care, guidance and support students receive is good. Child protection procedures are secure, widely understood and regularly reviewed. Health and safety is well managed. The introduction of the Pastoral Support Centre and non-teaching heads of year lies at the heart of the high quality pastoral care and improved links with parents. Transition arrangements for students in Years 7 and 10 are a strength. Students report that the support they receive helps them to settle in quickly.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Students are well prepared to make choices about their future, whether staying on in education or entering the world of work. The college has good assessment data to track students' progress, and many staff make effective use of this. Students know their target grades, but the quality of marking is variable because it does not always provide clear guidance on what to do to improve.

Provision for students with specific learning difficulties is good. Students who could become disaffected are identified in Year 9 and offered an alternative curriculum with additional support to retain them successfully in education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The college's leadership is strong and effective on many fronts. However, leadership and management are satisfactory overall. This is because, although there are significant successes, not all students, particularly boys, do as well as they should. The college has not been able to redress the declining achievement at Key Stage 4. Although individual subjects have shown some big improvements, there has been no significant overall increase in standards or achievement since the last inspection.

The complexities of the college's two points of entry pose significant challenges, but these are well managed so that students settle quickly and happily. Effective steps have been taken since the last inspection to improve transition arrangements and to strengthen support and guidance for students. In addition, the college has made judicious use of its resources to systematically address each of the issues from the last report.

The senior management team is experienced, hard working and cohesive, and ably led by the principal. There are good management structures with clear lines of responsibility and accountability that are effectively developing distributive leadership. Senior managers set a clear educational direction. Recent reorganisation and appointments have significantly strengthened middle leadership. Well structured improvement planning involves managers at all levels in supporting the college's development.

There are well established procedures for monitoring and reviewing performance. Indeed, college self-evaluation is systematic and thorough, but the process has not been sufficiently rigorous in rooting out weaknesses, and has not been an effective tool for raising achievement. There has not, until recently, been a sharp enough focus on improving the quality of the students' learning. Data on pupils' progress indicate that more rigorous reviews and action planning are beginning to impact positively on student progress.

The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Governors are directly involved in the college's self-evaluation and are effective in carrying out their duties.

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?	3	3
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	3	3
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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

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	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	3	
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?	3	3
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?	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?	3	3
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	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	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

Thank you for the contribution that you made to our recent inspection. Your opinions were important in confirming what staff, parents and governors told us. Like other visitors, we were impressed by the relaxed and positive relationships between students and also between students and adults. It is clear that most of you:

- Enjoy college and the many opportunities that it offers you.
- Have positive attitudes to learning and behave very well.
- Make excellent progress during your time in the high school.

It is also clear that the college has a particularly wide and varied curriculum, and that some of your teaching is good or even outstanding. Another obvious strength is the good support and guidance that you receive at vital times, such as your transition into Year 7 and Year 10. Wreake Valley is a very caring place for you to work and develop as young adults.

The inspection report reflects these strengths, but it also highlights areas that could be improved. Most significantly, the excellent achievement in the high school is not sustained in the upper school. In general you make expected progress in your GCSEs and in the sixth form, but a significant number of students should do better. This is particularly true of boys at GCSE. Some parents and students pointed out that behaviour could be better. It was disappointing to observe that a few individuals are disrespectful and disruptive in lessons because this affects the quality of learning for the whole group. We have specifically asked the college to:

- Ensure that all of you achieve as well as you should.
- Focus on improving the overall quality of learning, so that more lessons are as good as the best.

The college has already identified these areas for improvement and we are confident that they will be addressed effectively. We wish you every future success.