



Frome Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123862
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292820
Inspection dates 8–9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Wiola Hola HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Bath Road
School category	Community		Frome
Age range of pupils	13–18		BA11 2HQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01373 465353
Number on roll (school)	1483	Fax number	01373 469078
Number on roll (6th form)	375		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	David Vincent
		Headteacher	B Bates
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
13–18	8–9 November 2006	292820

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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

The school is larger than average. It serves the town of Frome and surrounding areas and draws students from a wide range of backgrounds and with a very wide range of attainment on entry into Year 9. Overall attainment on entry is average. Most students come from a White British background. There are very few students with English as an additional language. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is also broadly average. The school has been a specialist college for the media arts since October 2002. It shares many facilities with the local community. The Merlin Theatre is on the school's site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides well for students in many respects, particularly in giving them a very wide range of educational experiences and in promoting their personal development which is good. It is extremely effective in supporting students, particularly the most vulnerable, to be included in school activities. Students are generally confident and courteous and enjoy learning. Standards are average and students' academic achievement is satisfactory overall, with strengths in the sixth form and in some subjects, but with weaknesses in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

The school sees itself as being at the heart of the community and this is indeed the case. Community links are very strong and partnership working with other local schools and organisations are productive. These links and the school's status as a specialist media college enhance students' educational experiences in many areas.

The school has made concerted efforts to raise standards in recent years and the impact of this work is clearly visible in Year 9; the 2006 national test results show an improvement on the average standards in 2005. The GCSE results were showing a rising trend; they were average in 2005 but dipped in 2006. In response to this dip, the school has increased its determination to improve. In the sixth form, standards are above average.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with some good features although there are inconsistencies within and between subjects. Some teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers' use of assessment information to keep a close check on students' progress is bearing fruit although the improved systems for doing this are still relatively new and not consistently applied across the school. Students generally get satisfactory advice about their targets and how to improve their work but some students are not as clear as they might be about these. The curriculum is good. Students' needs and interests are generally met well through an excellent range of course. The quality of courses varies, however, and students are not always fully engaged or motivated. Students feel very positive about the provision in the arts and media. They are well cared for and feel safe.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. Good strategies for school improvement have been put into place in the last year or so, not all of which have had time to impact on standards. Senior leaders are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Capacity to improve is good. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and visible in students' attendance and behaviour, in science and information and communication technology (ICT), in accommodation, in standards in Year 9, and in the vocational provision.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enjoy greatly their education and achieve well in their chosen subjects. Standards are above average overall but the proportion of students obtaining the top A-level grades is not as high as might be expected.

Students are confident, articulate and extremely mature in their attitudes. They work together well. They take up the many enrichment opportunities the school provides, for example to travel abroad, exhibit their work and contribute to the educational development of younger pupils. Students develop their awareness of the world of work well through vocational courses and work-related activities.

In the sixth form, teaching and learning are good and best practice is shared effectively. Students are aware of their progress and how they can improve their work further. A broad range of courses is provided to interest and challenge students. Students get very good advice about courses and future career and educational options. The sixth form is well led and managed by highly motivated teachers whose knowledge is respected by their students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall quality of provision in mathematics in Years 10 and 11 to enhance students' enjoyment and engagement and raise standards.
- Ensure that more teaching and learning are of the good quality seen in some lessons; share good practice more widely; and eradicate the inconsistencies in relation to pace, interest and assessment.
- Improve students' understanding of their own targets for learning and how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory overall. In the sixth form, however, the picture is stronger; standards are above average and achievement is good.

Results in the 2005 national tests in Year 9 were average overall. Students generally made good progress but with underachievement in English and for a few specific groups. In 2006, results improved in English and also in mathematics showing the impact of the school's concerted efforts to raise standards in Year 9. The school's targets were met in 2006.

The GCSE examination results were average in 2005, and had shown a rising trend. They dipped in 2006, based on the percentage of pupils gaining five or more high grades, and targets were not met. The school has increased in recent years the proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE qualifications (grades A*-G) to

significantly above average. The GCSE results show that students made good progress overall in Years 10 and 11 but progress in mathematics was significantly below average. Students did less well in mathematics, science and English literature than in their other subjects. They did well in art, design and technology, English language, ICT and French. They achieved well in the GCSE short courses taken. Current standards and achievement show a similar variation and an added strength in religious studies. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities now do as well as their peers, which was not the case in the recent past.

In the sixth form, students achieve well in art and design, media studies, psychology, product design, general studies, drama, and in vocational subjects, particularly leisure and recreation.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are relaxed and friendly and show considerable respect towards each other, teachers and visitors. They generally behave well and move calmly around the large school site. Incidents of bullying are few and these are quickly dealt with. A few parents raised concerns about instances of disruption in lessons and students state that these do occasionally happen. Attendance has improved and is now average. Students feel safe at school and are confident that they can seek support from a range of adults if they need to. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. They have numerous opportunities for spiritual reflection, for example in religious education lessons and assemblies.

Students are well aware of what to do to keep healthy; this theme is taught well in personal, social and health education. Healthy food options are available and many students take advantage of the excellent sporting facilities. Students contribute well to the school community, through the school council for example, and also to the wider community through charity events and cultural activities. Sixth form students effectively mentor younger ones. Students develop their skills for the future well. Their basic skills are sound; they collaborate well and engage confidently in discussion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Sometimes they are excellent. Lessons are calm and purposeful. Students enjoy practical and creative lessons; they are generally less enthusiastic about some others, and cite as examples lessons in the core subjects of mathematics and science.

Most lessons are planned carefully, so that work is accurately matched to students' abilities and specific needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They generally employ a range of teaching strategies to engage fully students' interest and ensure at least adequate progress. Sometimes, however, the pace is too slow, levels of challenge are low and the range of teaching methods is limited; as a result, students' progress is barely satisfactory.

Assessment in lessons is usually good, although not consistently well applied across the school. Not all students are sufficiently clear about their targets or how to improve their work. Students are generally supported effectively by classroom assistants whose work is directed well by teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good with some excellent features. A wide range of courses and support exists for all students, including the more able as well as those with various barriers to learning. The higher level courses in the sixth form are good and plans are in place for the further extension of vocational provision. In many subjects, students benefit from imaginative provision and stimulating resources. Elsewhere, in mathematics for example, course content is covered but with little use of available technology, few tasks set in meaningful contexts or using interesting investigations.

The school works in partnership with many local institutions to give students experience and insight into the world of work and to participate creatively, for example in running a local radio station. The range of extra-curricular activities is excellent, ranging from sports to drama and music along with visits to Canada, Poland and local study centres. The debating society is well attended. Many students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Some students have personalised programmes to meet their particular needs. This has had the effect of reducing disaffection and improving attendance. Well-briefed form tutors and achievement team leaders help students plan their futures and prepare them for economic self-sufficiency. Education for safety and health is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. There are good links with the middle schools to ensure a smooth transition and effective liaison with partner establishments in the tertiary sector. Good links also exist with agencies such as the 'Connexions' service, the chaplain, the police and youth service. Tutors know and support their students well. Risk assessments are regularly carried out and arrangements for child protection are robust and comprehensive.

The procedures for academic monitoring have been thoroughly and effectively revised in the last 15 months and form a strong basis for increasing students' achievements. These have yet to be fully exploited and evaluated by staff. Inconsistencies exist in their use to ensure that all students are aware of their progress and targets for learning. The school has improved its capacity for identifying students who might be underachieving but more remains to be done. Support and care for vulnerable students are outstanding and reflect the very strong inclusive ethos in which the needs of every student really matter.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. Governors and the senior leadership team have a clear vision for the future of the school, both in terms of enriching provision and raising standards. The school's pace of change has resulted in satisfactory rather than good improvement since the last inspection. There is now an increased determination to improve and quickly.

Most parents are positive about what the school offers and the school is held in high regard in the community. The school takes good account of the views of students and parents. Partnerships with other agencies and organisations are strong. Staff enjoy working here. They are supported and encouraged.

The school's self-evaluation is effective. All areas of the school undergo regular, rigorous review with ensuing adjustments made where necessary. For example, a recent review resulted in a management re-organisation through which achievement team leaders as well as curriculum team leaders aim to keep a close check on students' progress. The school correctly judges teaching and learning to be 'satisfactory but improving and close to good'. It states that 'some good practice is shared with other schools'. It could do more to share good practice internally as well. The leadership team is aware that provision and outcomes in mathematics have some shortcomings; actions for improvement have yet to show an impact on raising standards in Years 10 and 11. Improvements in science and ICT since the last inspection are visible. Other indicators, such as students' increased attendance and better behaviour, also demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve.

The school's specialist status as a media arts college has had a positive effect in many areas. Funds are deployed and managed well. The school's value for money is satisfactory in view of the students' satisfactory achievements. The local community enjoys access to many of the superb facilities available on the site.

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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?	3	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?	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	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	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The attendance of learners	3	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
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	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?	3	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?	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	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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	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

As you know, a team of inspectors visited the school recently. Thank you for your welcome. We appreciate the help many of you gave us by talking about your work and sharing your views. You clearly enjoy being at this school which provides a satisfactory quality of education overall.

- These are the best features about your school:
- You are provided with a very wide range of educational experiences in the courses offered, in the extra-curricular provision, and through the high quality facilities.
- You are confident, have good attitudes to work, behave well and show respect to each other, staff and visitors.
- Students in the sixth form achieve well. Students in Years 9 to 11 achieve well in some subjects such as art, design and technology, English language, ICT, French and religious education.
- Some lessons are excellent and many are good. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory.
- Students who have difficulties of various kinds are supported extremely well.
- The school's status as a media arts college is having a positive impact in many areas.
- You are very well cared for so that you feel safe and supported.
- Governors and senior staff are very clear about what the school does well and how it can improve. They lead and manage the school well.

We have highlighted the following as being the most important areas for improvement, so that you all achieve your best. The school now needs to:

- Improve GCSE results in mathematics and also your enjoyment of the subject by providing you with a wider range of learning experiences and increasing the pace and level of challenge in some lessons.
- Ensure that more teaching and learning are of the high quality seen in some lessons.
- Improve your understanding of your own targets for learning and how to improve your work; you all have a part to play here in making sure that you know about these things and act upon them.

Many of your parents or carers told us that they value greatly what the school provides. We wish you all the very best for your own futures and for the future of the school.