



Great Cornard Upper School and Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124797
Local Authority SUFFOLK
Inspection number 293116
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Ian Seath HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	College address	Head Lane
School category	Community		Great Cornard, Sudbury
Age range of pupils	13–18		Suffolk CO10 0JU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01787 375232
Number on roll (college)	648	Fax number	01787 377386
Number on roll (6th form)	158	Chair	Mr Ian Gibbs
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr Mike Foley
Date of previous college inspection	2 December 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
13–18	7–8 March 2007	293116

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Introduction

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

Description of the college

Great Cornard Upper School and Technology College is a mixed comprehensive for students aged 13 to 18. It is located in the south of Suffolk and at the time of inspection had around 800 students on the roll, about 150 of whom were in the sixth form. It serves an area of relatively low deprivation, and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has specialist technology college status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. Since the last inspection there has been a steady improvement in standards until 2005, when they were broadly average overall and achievement was satisfactory. However, in 2006, achievement and standards declined markedly and unexpectedly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Many students did not achieve to their full potential, and many indicators of performance fell to significantly below national averages.

This decline has focussed the school to introduce measures to ensure that it is reversed as quickly as possible. Many changes have been introduced in a short time. For example, the school has improved the ways in which it checks the progress of students and the targets it gives them, so that they are clear what they have to do to improve. Early indications are that these changes are having beneficial effects.

In general, the school supports and cares for its students well and, as a result, their personal development and well-being are good. They feel safe and speak highly of the support they are given. However, the learning support provided for lower ability students has not been well organised and the school has taken steps to change this. Behaviour around the school is good.

The school has specialist technology college status. Facilities for the teaching of technology related subjects are good. The school has good links with nearby further education colleges and many students at Key Stage 4 are able to attend vocational courses as a result. These include engineering, construction, hair and beauty and horse care. However, the choices in vocational provision within the sixth form are underdeveloped. The school recognises the need to develop gifted and talented provision to stretch the more able students at all key stages, including the sixth form.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior staff and governors provide a clear direction. Based on the improvements seen since the last inspection, together with the speed with which measures were introduced following poor performance in 2006, inspectors judged that the school's capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Achievement and standards have improved since the last inspection and until 2005, students generally achieved in line with expectation. In 2006 however, A-level results declined and many students did not achieve as would be expected when considering their GCSE results, particularly at the highest grades. To address this, the monitoring of students' progress has recently improved. Target grades are now set and students are clearer about what they need to do to achieve them. Students value their time in the sixth form and speak highly of the support they receive. A-level provision is broadly satisfactory but the school does not cater for the needs of all students who may wish to remain in education after GCSEs, particularly in vocational areas. Some A-level groups are very small.

What the college should do to improve further

- Improve achievements and standards at Key Stage 4.
- Increase the proportion of students achieving the highest grades in A levels.
- Develop the gifted and talented provision to stretch the most able students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. In 2006, achievement and standards declined markedly and unexpectedly. Following this, the school has carefully and thoroughly evaluated why this occurred and has implemented many changes. Early indications are that these are having a positive effect. For example, the school's own evaluations indicate improved performance this year. In addition, early results from A-level modules show improvement. However, it is too soon to be sure that these improvements will result in significantly better examination results and that they can be sustained.

When students enter the school at the age of 13 most have already reached a level of attainment around the national average. In Key Stage 3 they achieve well, often making better than expected progress. Progress is good in English and mathematics, and satisfactory in science. Less able students, together with those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3.

In Key Stage 4, up to 2005, students made satisfactory progress overall, although for lower ability males progress was below that expected. Progress in English and mathematics was good. The proportion of students achieving 5 or more grades A* to C at GCSE was higher than the national average, though with some variations between subjects.

However, in 2005/06, many aspects of achievement and standards declined markedly. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A* to C grades declined from 3% above the national average for schools of this type in 2005 to 8% below, although the drop was less when higher grades in English and mathematics are included. The decline was most marked for lower ability males and middle ability females. Some individual subjects declined significantly. In addition, the proportion of students achieving the highest grades (A* and A) declined. Overall, students' progress was well below that expected.

Achievements and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. In recent years the overall grades obtained by students in their A-level examinations have improved to around the national average. Progress has generally been in line with expectations, and better in a few subjects. However, in 2005/06, the proportion of students achieving the highest grades declined, as did students' progress. As with Key Stage 4, there are early indications that achievements overall will improve this year, though it is too soon to be sure.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance is close to the national average and is closely monitored. Behaviour is generally good except in a few classes where teaching does not match sufficiently the needs of students. Students enjoy school. They feel safe and report that bullying is not tolerated. Good progress has been made in introducing healthier meals. Students demonstrate a good awareness and understanding of the needs of others in the local, national and global communities through sponsorship and fundraising activities. They take responsibility for decision making over charity involvement and have been successful in their fundraising. The school council and parliament effectively represent the views of students and frequently make decisions about aspects of school life. Students benefit from work placements which contribute directly to their social and economic well-being. However, in the sixth form they are not provided with a broad enough range of vocational courses or study skills to enable them to fully develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their further economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some examples of good practice. Teachers have good specialist subject knowledge. In most lessons, students make the progress expected of them because the pace is brisk, tasks are closely matched to students' needs and a range of teaching methods ensure that they remain interested. In a few poorly managed lessons students become bored, occasionally disruptive, and progress is poor. Registration time is not always used effectively to the benefit of students. Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory though the use of computers and interactive white boards in class is underdeveloped and not consistent with the school's technology college status.

There has been some inconsistency in tracking students' progress, and this was a contributory factor in the decline in examination results in 2006. The school has now improved tracking systems so that students' progress can be more accurately monitored. Students are set targets regularly. Most, but not all, students are aware of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to improve and meet target grades. Behavior in lessons is generally good. Though good in some areas, homework is not consistently set. Marking of students' work does not always correct spelling and grammar in subjects other than English. In science, teachers have placed special emphasis on literacy to enable students to understand subject material more easily. The school is working to improve assessment practice in class.

Early diagnosis of learning needs and communications with feeder schools are good. However, this information is not always used systematically in lessons and consequently teaching does not always cater for all abilities. Teaching assistants are not always used efficiently to benefit students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides a range of opportunities for students. There is an emphasis on technology in all years, reflecting the school's specialist status. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced. Students have the opportunity to study a different modern foreign language to that taught in Years 7 and 8 at middle school. All students take a common core of subjects at Key Stage 4, including technology. The Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a satisfactory range of academic options. A significant number of students undertake a range of vocational courses at the local further education college, for example, in construction or engineering. The sixth form curriculum consists of a range of A-level subjects but lacks vocational options. These do not yet fully meet the needs of those who may wish to pursue applied or vocational options within the sixth form. Students receive excellent careers guidance. The school has effective partnerships with local employers. Students benefit from the extended and well developed work experience programme provided in Year 10. The range of enrichment activities is good, particularly in sport and the performing arts, although levels of participation are not monitored closely. Students benefit from a good breadth of extra-curricular provision and enjoy their time at the school. Provision to stretch the most able students is underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All staff have had recent training in child protection and a significant number of key staff have begun further training. The school complies with requirements for safeguarding students. Liaison with middle schools is good and ensures that students' transition is smooth. Support for students with learning difficulties or disabilities has not always been effective and has been inconsistently managed. However, this has recently improved with better utilisation of teaching assistants, better monitoring, and more rigorous review. Looked-after children are well supported. Careers information is very well organised and the school has achieved the 14-19 standard in guidance and support. The Connexions service works very effectively with students, staff and parents to give good careers advice. Students at risk of failing to complete their Key Stage 4 education are identified early and alternative provision is made for them. Additional Easter revision sessions for Year 11 students are now provided and those students at risk of failure are monitored. New learning mentors support the heads of house and tutors. Their non-teaching role

means that they are able to act quickly to deal with students or liaise with families and external agencies if necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, senior staff and governors provide a clear direction. However, school monitoring did not give adequate warning of the poor results in 2006. Since then, the school has carefully identified and quickly implemented measures to improve students' achievement. For example, systems to monitor students' progress have been introduced throughout the school, together with much improved target setting. These targets are designed to stretch students to achieve their best. Though there are early indications of improvements, it is too early to be sure that they will be sustained.

All subject departments have been thoroughly reviewed. These reviews are detailed and accurately identify where improvements are necessary, though they are not always sufficiently critical of teaching and learning. Individual staff are accountable to the governing body for their teaching groups' examination results. Although the school's self-evaluation identifies most of the actions necessary for improvement, its grading is overgenerous. Teachers are observed in lessons regularly, but the process does not yet identify weaknesses in enough detail in order to coordinate departmental training needs. There is insufficient attention to learning and the identification and sharing of good practice is insufficiently well developed. Middle managers do not yet have enough training to assess the quality of teaching and learning accurately in lessons.

Staff are well trained in child protection procedures and are well deployed but the use of learning assistants needs further review. Senior staff provide good support for individual teachers, including the newly qualified. Learning resources are satisfactory and in some areas good. The computing facilities have improved, providing good access for students. Accommodation overall is adequate. Facilities for teaching technology are good and the new sports facilities are outstanding.

The governing body, under its new chair, has given its full support to the school's improvement programme. Governors are well informed by the headteacher and are sufficiently critical of the schools performance. The school has operated with a budget deficit for the past three years, but this is being steadily reduced under the careful guidance of a new bursar, senior leaders and governors. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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>	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	3
How well does the college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the college'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	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
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 college require special measures?	No	
Does this college require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 March 2007

Dear Students,

Great Cornard Upper School and Technology College, Head Lane, Great Cornard, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 0JU

As you will probably know, three other inspectors and I visited your school recently. We met with many of you, sat in on classes, and talked with many of your teachers. Throughout this you were helpful and courteous, and we would like to thank you. We were also pleased to receive many completed forms from your parents. Your school has many strengths and one of them is you.

You are fortunate to attend a school with such good sports facilities. You have good opportunities to study aspects of technology and an excellent theatre. You told us that you enjoy your time at school and that bullying is very rare. You can help keep it this way by talking with either a teacher or sixth form mentor if you are affected.

The school will be working even harder to help you succeed in your examinations and to do well later in life. It has already made some changes to help this. For example, you should all have target grades which will make sure you achieve to the very best of your ability. But the school cannot do this by itself, and teachers need your help. If you are not clear about how to meet your targets you should ask - everybody should be clear about what steps they need to take to achieve their best and it is in your interests to find out if you are not sure. We have asked the school to provide more challenges for those of you who learn quickly, and to help more sixth form students reach the top grades at A level.

The school will also be making changes to give you even more opportunities to do well in different ways. This could include extra opportunities in new subjects, particularly those which are work or job related.

I would like to thank you once again, and I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Seath HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools