



Thurston Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124802
Local Authority SUFFOLK
Inspection number 293117
Inspection date 27 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Godwood

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	Community College address	Norton Road Thurston, Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP31 3PB
School category	Community	Telephone number	01359230885
Age range of pupils	13–18	Fax number	01359230880
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair	Mr C Farthing
Number on roll (community College)	1412	Headteacher	Miss H Wilson
Number on roll (6th form)	360		
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous community College inspection	4 March 2002		

Age group 13–18	Inspection date 27 November 2006	Inspection number 293117
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors over one day.

Description of the community College

Thurston Community College is larger than average and has a large sixth form. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is below average.

The college has specialist science status. It has several awards, including Healthy Schools status, Artsmark Silver, Sportsmark, Investors in People and the Financial Management Standard in Schools. A new principal took up post in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the community College

Grade: 2

Thurston Community College is a good school with outstanding features. It is improving strongly as a result of outstanding leadership and management, although management developments have not yet had time to have a full impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

Students achieve well and gain above average results in Year 9 tests, GCSE examinations and A levels. A notable feature of the results is their consistency. Students of all abilities, both boys and girls, achieve well and hardly any students underachieve. This is due partly to outstanding care, guidance and support. Students' welfare is a high priority and their progress is monitored carefully. Students who have personal difficulties or are in danger of underachieving are supported very effectively through the well managed pastoral system. Another reason for consistent results is an outstanding curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11. There is a very wide range of courses to suit all students' interests, including highly academic subjects such as philosophy and ethics, vocational courses such as catering, and work-related learning. Specialist science status has raised aspirations and led to high standards in the specialist subjects of science and mathematics. Students' learning in other subjects has also benefited through additional resources and developments in teachers' expertise.

The quality of teaching is good, and sometimes outstanding, but not consistently so. Many lessons are very well planned and interesting, and enable students to think for themselves and make very good progress. In a minority of weaker lessons, however, students are not challenged sufficiently and in some cases not managed well enough. The college is alert to this and is already engaged in a programme to develop good practice in teaching and increase the number of high quality lessons.

Students enjoy school and the great majority behave very well - they are attentive in lessons and sensible around the site. Students' personal development and well-being are good overall. They adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles extremely well. The contribution that they make to the college and wider community is also outstanding. The majority of parents are pleased with the college. Many believe that their children are happy and well supported by committed staff. One wrote, 'This is a school where children are proud to be.' However, a few parents are concerned about variations in teaching quality and the behaviour of some students.

Over the past year, the principal has demonstrated outstanding leadership in providing a clear focus on improving students' learning. As a result, staff at all levels are very clear about their roles, well managed and highly motivated. The role of governors is also outstanding. The college evaluates its performance well and knows what needs to be done, including the issues identified in this inspection. At this stage, however, it has not made a strong link between the outcomes of its self-evaluation and the priorities included in the college improvement plan. On the basis of what has been achieved over the past year, its capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The college has a good sixth form. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching that is well informed and often engages students as independent learners. They are very well guided and establish very good relationships with their tutors. They also have very good opportunities be responsible, including mentoring younger students. As a result, their personal development is outstanding. The sixth form curriculum is good. It offers a very wide range of A-level courses but only a limited number of intermediate courses. Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding but, as with the main school, the improvements are too recent to have had a significant impact on students' achievement.

What the community College should do to improve further

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching through sharing good practice.
- Ensure that the outcomes from self-evaluation are used to give the college improvement plan a tight focus on improving students' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good in the main school and the sixth form. Students join the college with broadly average attainment and make good progress. National test results at the end of Year 9 are consistently above average in English, mathematics and science. Boys and girls make equally good progress.

GCSE results are also consistently above average. The results overall have risen steadily over the past three years, although the proportion of students gaining five or more higher grades dipped temporarily in 2005. Almost all students gain at least five passes, which is well above the national average. Most subjects produce equally good results. The progress that students make through the college is consistently good; in the 2005 results it was outstanding. The college did not quite meet its targets in 2006, including its science college target, but these were extremely challenging. Targets for the future are challenging but realistic. Students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties, make equally good progress.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average, or sometimes a little above. The great majority of students complete their courses successfully and A-level results are consistently well above average. Most science college targets have been met, and results in mathematics and biology are particularly strong. English results have been adversely affected by staffing difficulties, although these have now been resolved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are good overall, and outstanding in some respects. Students enjoy college and there is little that they wish to change. Their attendance is above average. Students' safety and health are promoted extremely well through the personal development programme, the successful arrangements for healthy eating and the extensive and popular sports activities. Students are very confident that any bullying will be dealt with effectively. Behaviour is well managed and the vast majority of students behave very well, both in lessons and around the college, although there is some disruption in a minority of lessons where teaching is weaker.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The contribution that they make to the college and wider community is outstanding. Large numbers engage actively in raising funds for many charities. Students are consulted well and help to make improvements through the school council. Sixth formers are effective in mentoring younger students. Through work experience and an 'enterprise day', students develop good workplace skills.

Sixth form students have particularly good relationships with their tutors and many opportunities to develop independence and take responsibility. As a result, their personal development is outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and the sixth form. In most lessons, students are very well motivated: they are cooperative and attentive and enjoy learning. This is because teachers prepare their lessons carefully and give clear, well informed explanations. They use questioning well to deepen and extend students' understanding. Often teachers use computerised displays extremely well to add impact to their presentations and pace to the lesson.

However, the quality of teaching is not entirely consistent. Some is outstanding, both in the sixth form and the main school - organised very effectively to encourage students to think for themselves, develop their independence and evaluate their own progress. Some weaker teaching lacks challenge and skill in class management, reducing students' interest and concentration. Marking is regular but varies in how well it guides students in improving their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is outstanding in the main school. It meets students' individual needs very well and is an important reason that students of all abilities achieve well. In Years 10 and 11, students have a very wide range of options available to suit their interests and aspirations, including some unusual subjects such as sociology and engineering. The college is successful in enabling almost all students to get their first choice of options. Students who are unlikely to succeed at a full programme of GCSE courses do extended work experience and take vocational courses at college. Students with learning difficulties have well planned individual support. Gifted and talented students have good additional opportunities, such as teaching science to middle school pupils.

The sixth form curriculum is good. It includes a very wide range of A-level courses that suit the needs of the 60% of Year 11 students that stay on each year. Students are pleased with the choices available. There are a small number of GCSE and vocational courses, but not enough to suit all the students who would like to stay on rather than go into further education.

Science college status has extended the range of courses in science and mathematics. There is a wide range of popular extra-curricular activities, including much sport, drama and music. The personal development programme is well planned and provides good support for students' understanding of their own development and their preparation for future choices.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are given very high priority and are outstanding. As a result, hardly any students seriously underachieve. The arrangements for child protection and ensuring safety in the college are extremely rigorous. In addition to the care provided by teachers, the college uses associate staff very effectively to provide additional support for vulnerable students. Through effective management of individual students, the number of exclusions has been reduced and students are successfully reintegrated into school. The college uses a multi-agency approach and maintains outstanding partnerships with other organisations. The transition from middle school is well managed and students settle quickly.

Students trust the adults to listen to their concerns. Through the house system, each student is known well. The houses are well organised and provide a strong structure for the work of tutors. Students benefit from good academic guidance. They have targets for each subject and their progress towards these is assessed each term and reported to parents. Students appreciate the annual Learning Conference and discussions with their tutor and parents on their achievements and what they need to

improve. The college monitors progress very carefully and provides good support for students who are in danger of underachieving; it is planning to enhance this further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Since her appointment, the principal has provided a very clear lead through her vision and through practical changes. As a result, the clarity of direction at all levels is outstanding. Over the past year, management posts have been restructured extremely effectively so that the new posts are focused very directly on improving students' learning. Staff with responsibilities understand their roles very clearly and teamwork is very effective. Lines of accountability are clear, with very robust arrangements for supporting and monitoring the work of middle managers. The effect is that staff morale is high and many staff feel a buzz of excitement from a shared understanding of the improvements that they are engaged in.

The quality of self-evaluation is good. Senior staff and governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement and are already working on the issues identified by the inspection. The views of students and parents are sought regularly. Examination results are analysed extremely rigorously. Heads of department have a clear understanding of the performance in their subject and the actions needed to make improvements. At this stage in the new management arrangements, however, the outcomes of self-evaluation have not been used sufficiently to give the priorities in the college improvement plan a tight focus on raising students' achievement.

Science college developments are well managed and have led to very good achievement and interest in science and mathematics. Other subjects and the local community have also benefited from improved facilities and teaching projects.

The role played by governors is outstanding. They are fully engaged in setting the college's long-term direction and rigorous in checking its progress. Through strong links with individual subjects, governors know the college well and act as critical friends at many levels. High quality financial management has been recognised by a national award. The college provides good 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>	Community 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?	2	2
How well does the community College work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the community College'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	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
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 community College require special measures?	No	
Does this community College require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 November 2006

Dear Students

Thurston Community College, Norton Road, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 3PB

Thank you for your help when we visited your college recently. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons and other activities. Many of you told us that you enjoy college and there is not much you would wish to change. We agree that it is a good school and has some aspects that are outstanding.

The quality of care and guidance is particularly good. There is plenty of support for students who have difficulties or are in danger of underachieving. Those of you we spoke to told us that you trust the adults to listen and help when you need it. The range of options available in Years 10 and 11 is outstanding. There is something to suit everyone and almost all get their first choices. The result of these features is that students of all abilities do well - both boys and girls - and very few seriously underachieve.

Overall you make good progress and achieve above average results, in Year 9, Year 11 and the sixth form. This is because you develop well as young people and are well taught, although the quality of teaching is not always consistently good. Most lessons are well organised, interesting and challenging; in these you behave very well and make very good progress. A minority of lessons are less good, however, and in some of these there are a few students who disrupt things.

The leadership and management of the college are outstanding and the college is on a firm course of improvement. Changes over the past year have given the staff a clear focus on improving your learning. Senior staff have a good knowledge of how things are going and are already working on the right things to raise standards further. We have asked them particularly to:

- improve your learning by increasing the number of good and outstanding lessons
- make sure that their improvement plans are based firmly on the information they gather about students' achievements and the quality of teaching.

We are confident that the college will continue to improve. You can help by making sure you know what to do to reach your targets and by concentrating in all lessons. We wish you the very best for your future.

John Godwood Lead inspector