

Tabor Science College

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 115231 |
| Local Authority | ESSEX LA |
| Inspection number | 302336 |
| Inspection dates | 20–21 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Mark Phillips HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| College | 1038 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Pam Farhey |
| Headteacher | Mr Steven Clark |
| Date of previous college inspection | 22 September 2003 |
| College address | Panfield Lane Braintree Braintree Essex CM7 5XP |
| Telephone number | 01376323701 |
| Fax number | 01376345834 |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
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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

Tabor Science College is a larger than average comprehensive school for students aged between 11 and 16, situated in the Bocking South ward of Braintree. Most students come from the Bocking South, Bocking North and Braintree Central wards. The great majority are from White British backgrounds and almost all have English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average; the social and economic background of students is in line with the national average but the number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is under half the national average. The majority of students come from areas where fewer adults have experience of higher education than is the national average.

Tabor has been a specialist college since September 2005, with science and mathematics as specialist subjects.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 2

Tabor is a good school that is characterised by a strong collegiate ethos amongst students and staff. Students, parents and staff all told inspectors that the college has improved well since the last inspection and this is borne out by the marked rise in GCSE results since Tabor achieved specialist science college status.

Achievement and standards are good overall. There is a strong focus on core skills, which enables a good and increasing number of students to participate in further education after Key Stage 4. Students make good progress in English and science; progress in mathematics by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory overall because not enough students gain the highest GCSE grades of A and A*. The curriculum is good as is teaching, due in large part to teachers' good subject knowledge and their consistent lesson planning. Students respond with good behaviour and enthusiasm. There is very little inadequate teaching but, at the same time, there are too few examples of the highest quality teaching. A few lessons do not provide work that challenges the more able students or matches the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. A small number of parents expressed concern about behaviour, but the extraordinarily low number of students excluded from college last year is indicative of the firm but supportive manner in which staff and students deal with any inappropriate behaviour. The college provides good care, guidance and support for students. The vertical tutoring system with all-age tutor groups is proving successful, with younger students benefiting from time spent with older role models. Tutors are given generous time for individual mentoring and this too is helping to promote good achievement and personal development. However, students' attendance at school is only satisfactory.

There are good links with other providers, particularly because of the specialist college status. The college provides effective post-16 teaching for the local further education college and this is of benefit to the whole community. Teaching and learning facilities at Tabor are superb and very well cared for. Additional building work since the last inspection has eased corridor congestion and provided new accommodation, which is helping to raise aspirations in modern foreign languages. Shared facilities with the community leisure centre mean that students have access to excellent opportunities for sport and fitness, which they take up with enthusiasm. One aspect of the facilities that students and parents are less happy about, however, is the lavatories; inspectors were told that access is limited during lesson times and that these amenities are not always maintained as well as they should be. Inspectors agree and the college agrees that this situation should be rectified immediately.

The headteacher leads the school with ambition and energy, supported well by an extended leadership team that has clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The college provides good value for money, and its capacity for further improvement is good. The college knows itself well through the 'Tabor Evaluation and Improvement Portfolio.' Improvements since the last inspection include a daily moment for reflection shared by the whole school community and, most importantly, improved boys' achievement. Through a variety of mentoring and teaching strategies, all boys make good, and in some cases, very good progress. Consequently this means that the challenge now is to raise girls' performance in line with that of boys, particularly at GCSE. The college is well aware of this, and results already gained by current Year 11 girls show improvement over last year's group.

What the college should do to improve further

- Raise the standards achieved by students so that they are consistently above average in all subjects at all Key Stages, and ensure that girls match the good progress now made by boys.
- Ensure that all lessons feature a range of activities that meet the learning needs of all students, including the most able and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Raise attendance levels to above the national average.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the college with average standards. They make good progress overall in Key Stage 3, particularly in English and mathematics. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall standards, as measured by average GCSE points scores, are broadly average. However, in 2007 the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was above average, and this represents good progress. Progress was particularly good in English and in science where the percentage of students gaining two A* to C grades at GCSE was also higher than average. The good progress observed in lessons during the inspection also confirmed that achievement overall in the school is good.

Increasingly, challenging targets are set and met for participation and achievement. A sign of the college's commitment to inclusion is that nearly all students take and pass GCSE English and mathematics, and the numbers studying English literature and double science are much higher than the national average. The performance in other subjects was variable in 2007. Standards in physical education were exceptional. In contrast, standards in geography and history were below average. The number of students opting for GCSE courses in the arts is well above the national average; whilst they make good progress in art, standards in drama were exceptionally low last year. The college has acted swiftly to bring in additional support and work observed during the inspection showed that current Year 11 students are making better progress. Similarly, whilst students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress in 2007, they did not do as well as their peers. Current students have a more appropriate and challenging curriculum, and they are now making better progress too.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy college and behave well. Relationships at every level are cordial. Students say that they feel very safe in school, and there are few recorded incidents of bullying or racist behaviour. The great majority of students and parents value the 'Tabor Account' scheme which underpins the college's clear expectations for good behaviour and attentive learning, but a few feel that there is inconsistency in how debits and credits are earned. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are aware of other faiths and ways of life and give good consideration to a range of local and global issues including racial harmony and safeguarding the environment.

A strong feature of the college is the extensive range of opportunities for students to take responsibility which they take up eagerly and often with remarkable maturity. Special training is provided for tasks such as bullying mentors. Equally significant is the respect given to the views of students in the everyday affairs of their community. The college is active in promoting safe and healthy lifestyles and students take good advantage of the excellent opportunities for keeping fit. Work-related experiences, a sense of community responsibility, good basic skills

in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and a mature self awareness help to prepare students well for their future economic well-being. However, attendance remains only satisfactory, and the college agrees that this is an important area for improvement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Very positive relationships between staff and students result in friendly, purposeful learning environments that help and encourage students' achievement and personal development. There is a clear consistency in the quality of lessons. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to develop the understanding of most students effectively. A common and detailed format for lesson planning along with a consistent approach to classroom management ensures a uniform approach across the school and results in many good learning opportunities. There is effective development of students' independent learning skills. A brisk pace of delivery and enjoyable activities engage students well in most lessons. However, some teachers do not challenge the more able students enough through the provision of more difficult and complex tasks. Similarly, in a few lessons there are insufficient simpler tasks for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The college introduced the tracking of student progress through work portfolios in 2007. This system is very well organised, allowing teachers easy access to examples of work for all students and promoting dialogue with parents. However, some teachers' marking is not thorough enough, and inspectors agree that both students and parents would appreciate more feedback about the quality of work produced and what could improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum provision is good overall, meeting all statutory requirements and the needs of the majority of students. There is good provision for safety education. Key Stage 3 provision is broad and balanced. There are well-planned programmes in Life Skills, and all Key Stage 4 students take short GCSE courses in citizenship and religious studies. In Key Stage 4, there are appropriate courses at all levels including alternative off-site work-related programmes. There are vocational GCSEs in ICT, health and social care, and leisure and tourism, but there are fewer opportunities for vocational study in other curriculum areas. Specialist college status has helped to boost ICT use across the curriculum. More able students are able to opt for an AS level examination in Science for Public Understanding in addition to the new 21st Century Science GCSEs, which the school has piloted for the past three years.

A good range of extra-curricular activities includes well attended sports clubs, drama productions, exchange visits, including a science college link with a Swedish school, skiing trips, and a programme of extension activities for the more able. However, the number of students learning to play musical instruments in college is extremely low.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All safeguarding procedures are robust. Students are confident that any problems they have will be taken seriously. One student said during the inspection, 'teachers help you and you know you have that support behind you'. There are effective links with a wide range of external agencies. Students' personal development is promoted well through the house system and all-age tutor groups, which encourage older students to act as mentors and good role models. Efficient monitoring of student absence is undertaken by house leaders but there is insufficient central coordination to promote improved attendance. There are good induction arrangements for students when they join Tabor, and guidance on selecting GCSE courses is also good. Careers guidance is well planned. Most students are aware of how well they are doing from regular discussion with tutors and subject staff and have clear personal targets to help ensure their continued progress. There is effective help for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Individual support arrangements are designed to be flexible so they meet their complex needs and enable them to make progress in their learning. However, whilst there are additional opportunities for more able and gifted students, their everyday work is not so effectively monitored or promoted.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior team give dynamic leadership to the college, with a strong commitment to increasing student motivation and enabling the best possible achievement for every student. Detailed strategic planning has ensured the successful introduction of initiatives that have led to improvement in significant areas. Shared expectations for improved standards and good behaviour and a common passion for learning amongst staff are having an impact as seen in students' good attitudes to learning. The coordination of departmental management with school improvement planning and teacher performance management is innovative and promotes effective self-evaluation involving leaders and managers at all levels. The college knows its strengths and areas for development, although written self-evaluation is sometimes too descriptive and does not always fully consider the quality of the college's performance against objective criteria.

The governing body undertakes its role as a critical friend very effectively. Governors know the college well and are fully involved in all aspects of its work. Students play an important part in moving the school forward and the articulate, active student leadership team work well in partnership with the senior leadership team. Financial management is good, and the college provides good value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | College Overall |
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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 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 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 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the college's self-evaluation | 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | 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

22 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Tabor Science College, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5XP

I am writing to let you know the results of our recent inspection of Tabor Science College. Student voice is a strong feature at Tabor, and we were pleased to hear your views about what makes the school work well and what you would like improved. When we spoke to your representatives on the school council and student leadership group, they told us that Tabor was a good place for learning. We agree. During our visit, we were particularly impressed with your behaviour and the way in which you get on with each other. Your examination results continue to improve, and last year more students gained good qualifications, including English, mathematics and science, than the national average. This is good news for you because it means that you have more chance of progressing to good sixth form courses and employment, so well done.

Mr Clark and I have agreed that there are some key priorities to help improve Tabor even more.

- Aim for even higher standards so that your work is above average in all subjects and help girls to achieve as well as boys, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Make sure that there is a good range of different activities in every lesson, so that everyone can work to their full potential whatever their ability.
- Improve attendance
- Ensure that there is better access to improved lavatory facilities for students throughout the school day.

You can help with two of these in particular. You need to make sure that you are only absent from school when it is absolutely necessary. There are too many days missed, and this does not help your learning. Mr Clark and I agree that the refurbishment of the lavatory facilities would be an excellent project for the school council to organise, with support from the senior staff and governors.

Thank you once again for the part that you played in this inspection and the very best of luck with your future studies, examinations, and career plans.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector