

Bodmin College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112049
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	310773
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1501
6th form	319
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Roberts
Headteacher	Robert Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Lostwithiel Road Bodmin PL31 1DD
Telephone number	01208 72114
Fax number	01208 261036

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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

Bodmin College is a larger than average secondary school. Numbers of students attending the sixth form are increasing. The majority of students are White British and come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. An increasing number of students are at the early stages of learning English and a lower than average number of students have learning difficulties or disabilities. Greenfield is a separate specialist unit on site for students with severe or moderate learning difficulties and who come from a wide geographical area. This means that the number of students who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than the national average.

The school has been a specialist science college since 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bodmin College is a good school with an outstanding curriculum. The staff and senior leadership team succeed in making every student feel valued and in creating a curriculum that is broad enough to provide stimulating learning for everyone. One parent said, 'Children are encouraged, no matter what their ability or interests'.

After the last inspection, the college embarked on an ambitious programme to develop a curriculum that both matched local needs and ensured an appropriate course for every student that would lead to further education or employment. Students, staff, employers and other stakeholders were consulted from the outset. In addition to the more traditional academic programme, the range of applied and vocational courses for 14 to 19 year olds was increased, with some, such as construction and hair and beauty, organised close by, but off-site at a specialist vocational centre. This autumn, these plans were extended further, with alterations to the school day which have allowed the current Year 9 to start on their GCSE courses a year earlier than in most schools. Specialist science status has also enabled a greater variety of pre- and post-16 science courses. The result is an outstanding and flexible curriculum, which sustains motivation and interest and prepares students well for their future. Attendance rates in Year 9 have improved in comparison with the same period last year and students report that they are greatly enjoying both the longer lessons and the opportunity to choose the courses they are doing.

When students arrive at the college, their attainment, particularly in mathematics, is below average. The college uses its specialist science status to enable older college students to work with primary school pupils to improve attainment, and these schools' Year 6 science test results have risen significantly in the last four years. A similar initiative is now being considered to improve mathematics. From low starting points, students at the college make good progress and achieve satisfactory standards at the end of Year 11 as a result of good teaching, although they do not achieve as well in English and mathematics as in other subjects. Recently there has been a strong focus on sharing the good practice of some outstanding teachers across the whole staff, and the evidence from lessons and data for this term indicate that this is beginning to accelerate progress further.

Relationships between staff and students are good. Students enjoy their education very much and say that they are well cared for and guided. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly appreciative of the individual support they receive. They join in enthusiastically with the wide variety of extra-curricular activities available. Although the College Council has had some influence in both college and local decisions, for example in setting up a cycle track across the town, many students do not feel that their views are represented fully. Parents share this view and feel that the college does not regularly ask for their opinions or act on them.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and the senior leadership team know the college's strengths and weaknesses well. Careful monitoring of performance and effective action planning at departmental and senior management level are helping to raise students' achievement. Effective analysis of data takes place for individual subjects. However, although systems are in place to collect information about students' attendance, behaviour and learning needs, these data are not always effectively analysed or linked together with individual subject data on academic achievement, to give a coherent picture of what support individual students

need, or to inform strategic planning. Nevertheless, current developments in college organisation, staffing and the quality of teaching and learning are already beginning to have an effect on achievement, and this indicates a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students are mature, confident, articulate and responsible. They work hard and with interest on subjects they have chosen. They value highly the many opportunities provided and describe a 'strong sense of community where everyone is welcomed and valued'. In recent surveys, 100% of parents and students said sixth form education was enjoyable and they would recommend Bodmin College to others.

Staying on rates into the sixth form are very high, and numbers have grown by one third in the last five years as students also transfer from other schools. The vast majority of students complete their courses. This is largely the result of good teaching and the substantial improvements in the curriculum, which was an area of weakness at the last inspection and is now outstanding. In addition to more academic subjects, appropriate courses are provided for students who would not previously have stayed in education or training. A weekly recreation session enables enrichment activities such as performing arts and sports to flourish.

The introduction of a structured target setting and mentoring system in September 2006, with focused support from a dedicated team of sixth form tutors, has had a significant impact on students' achievement. The development of 'traffic lighting' tracking this year is a positive further step, as tutors and sixth form leaders have the necessary information to support their guidance discussions with students. Sixth form leaders are systematically tackling variation in progress between subjects and providing good capacity to continue recent improvements. They have a clear view of what is working well and what needs doing next.

What the school should do to improve further

- integrate and further develop current data systems to provide a comprehensive analysis of information which can be used to raise individual student achievement, particularly in English and mathematics
- survey the opinions of parents and current students in Years 7 to 11 and take account of their views in planning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment on entry to the college in Year 7 is below the national average, especially in mathematics. Although students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, the standards they achieve are below the national average. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, students have made good enough progress to reach average standards. Boys achieve particularly well. In 2006, the percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE was 60 per cent, just above the national average and the local authority target. Although this figure was slightly lower than the previous year, the attainment of students in this year group was lower when they started at the college. Achievement in English and mathematics is weaker than in other subjects and the college is working hard to improve this. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

The wide range of courses available means that students also enter the sixth form with standards that are slightly below the national profile. Overall, they make good progress so that when they leave, the attainment of those on academic courses is broadly in line with national standards. The progress made by the 30 per cent of students in the smaller groups of applied, vocational and practical courses is even better. Sixth form students currently in the college make better progress than that made by those who left in 2006 and 2007 because the curriculum is more suited to their needs and their progress is monitored more systematically.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are very happy in college, proud of the new uniform and really enjoy their lessons, particularly in Years 9, 10 and 11 when they can make choices about some of the subjects they study. This is reflected in the steady improvement in attendance since the last inspection so it is now close to the national average. Students feel safe and protected at the college. They know how to avoid accidents in practical lessons and understand the consequences of dangerous behaviour out of college. On the few occasions when bullying occurs, they are confident it will be sorted out as soon as they report it. Most of the time, behaviour around the college and in lessons is good. Students with extra difficulties especially feel they are helped to become more confident and make the most of their college experiences. Students know what is in a healthy diet and many have improved their food choices. A great many take advantage of the wide range of sporting activities offered.

The strong teaching of religious education helps to develop students' spiritual ideas. Students are welcoming to others of different backgrounds but do not have enough awareness of the diverse cultures represented in modern Britain. Their understanding of moral choices is extended through debates in tutor time, assemblies and personal and social education. Good opportunities to improve their social skills arise on work placements and residential trips. They work increasingly effectively in groups and teams, particularly in subjects where they are solving practical problems. As students move up the college, many take on responsibility for helping those who are younger and less confident, for example as sports, art or science leaders, reading mentors and supporting Year 7 students. Others work with primary school pupils and on projects in the local community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Some teaching is outstanding and the senior leadership team has put systems in place to extend this good practice across the college. For instance, there is a successful system of peer coaching, whilst the learning forum offers opportunities for teachers to share expertise and planning of lessons. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has recognised the excellent work done by the science department in developing effective teaching and learning by filming some of their classes for use in the training of national consultants and science departments.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and refer to a broad range of teaching styles. Students are engaged, well behaved and interact well with one another. In livelier lessons, there is control and respect for each other's ideas. Creative planning for the longer lessons now in place injects variety and pace and provides scope for independent learning. Many teachers use assessment information effectively to set goals and provide challenging targets. Although teachers are aware of the range of needs in classes, they do not always meet them effectively. Sometimes learning intentions are not made clear and, in some lessons, the teacher talks for too long and students do not have enough opportunity to work independently.

Teaching is also good in the sixth form. Students greatly value the accessibility of their teachers and the individual advice and guidance they receive on assignments and coursework. In many subjects, such as leisure and recreation, art and dance, teachers expertly help students to develop the independence necessary for their future. However, in some academic subjects, such as mathematics, lessons are more teacher-centred and students are therefore less in control of their own learning.

Specialist schools status has allowed extensive investment in information and communication technology (ICT) such as interactive whiteboards. Staff training and sharing of good practice in ICT has led to greater expertise and confidence and this has led in turn to a greater degree of student involvement in lessons. Classroom assistants are also effectively deployed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is a wide range of academic, vocational and applied courses available for students from Year 9 to Year 13. Using the science bid as a springboard, the college has developed extensive facilities for work-related courses and strong links with local businesses. The new two-year Key Stage 3 involved completely rewriting schemes of work. The college believes that by reducing overlap and eliminating unnecessary content, pupils will still be adequately prepared for their GCSE courses. To facilitate this, an innovative three-lesson day plus a shorter tutor time were introduced in September 2007. Most students prefer the longer lessons as they feel they are getting more teaching time. They also find that the variety of interesting learning activities provided by their teachers means that they stay involved and behave well.

Students have insufficient understanding of some citizenship issues, particularly multicultural aspects. Citizenship and personal, social and health education were reorganised in September 2007 so students are taught by the same small team of experienced teachers.

The curriculum is enhanced by a rich and diverse programme of extra-curricular activities, which students value and support. These opportunities are invaluable in building good relationships between the students themselves, teachers and the wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are given good care, support and encouragement and feel they have someone they can turn to with problems. They feel welcomed into Year 7 and soon settle in. Very good advice is provided for choosing suitable GCSE and sixth form courses. The college prepares students very well for progression to higher education or employment so that transition is smooth. Links

with outside agencies to support students are good. Systems for monitoring and dealing with unacceptable behaviour, including racism and bullying, are good and, consequently, the number of exclusions is falling. Some parents feel that there is unresolved bullying in the college but the inspectors found no evidence to support this. Tutors give good advice to individuals about their academic progress and peer mentoring is available when students start to fall below their targets. A range of methods is used to keep parents informed about college activities and their children's successes and problems but not all parents feel that their concerns and opinions are listened to.

Safeguarding procedures are fully in place. The systems for checking attendance and punctuality are very new and not fully efficient or effective. First-day absence calls to parents are not carried out for all students.

The Greenfield Unit caters very effectively for 33 students who have severe or complex needs. The high number of adults ensures that students are encouraged, helped and supervised all the time, which enables them to make good progress. At the time of the inspection, students were learning all the subjects of the curriculum through preparing a Christmas production and were thoroughly enjoying themselves. The unit does not currently make enough use of the equipment and subject expertise in the main college, although students able to follow a mainstream course towards a qualification are encouraged to do so. All students leave with some accreditation for their achievements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Strong leadership and the clear vision of the headteacher and the leadership team have led to an improved curriculum and better teaching and learning since the last inspection. Challenging targets are set and a comprehensive system of self-evaluation, monitoring and review leads to good progress for students. Middle managers and all staff are clear about priorities for development. Staff feel their ideas are valued and they are encouraged to share good practice with others. Governors are enthusiastically involved with the life of the school and community.

The recent curriculum developments have led to the college being recognised as a leader of vocational education in Cornwall. The college was also awarded the Investors in Work Related and Enterprise Learning (IWREL) in March 2007.

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

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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.

Annex A

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Bodmin College, Bodmin PL31 1DD

You will remember when inspectors came to inspect your college early in November. We were impressed with the confident way in which you shared your views with us. In return, I would like to tell you about our findings. I hope that some of you will want to read the full report which you will find at www.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Bodmin College is a good school. The new curriculum that allows Year 9 to start their GCSE courses early and provides a wide range of more practical as well as traditional courses is outstanding. You told us how much you are enjoying the variety of activities in the longer lessons and we know that you will be well prepared for work and further education when you leave. Many of you now stay on into the sixth form because the curriculum meets your needs well. Achievement and standards are good because teaching is good, although you and the college must keep working at improving standards in English and mathematics. You have some excellent teachers who share their skills with others across the college.

We were very impressed by your enthusiasm for helping each other and taking on further responsibility, for example in primary schools and supporting younger students with paired reading. You also join in with the music and arts activities and with sport after school. Some of you, as well as your parents, told us that you were not consulted enough about what you think and that your views are not taken into account sufficiently by the college, so we have asked for improvements in this as well.

Your headteacher and senior leaders do a good job, as do the teaching and support staff who work very hard to take care of you to make sure each one of you succeeds as well as you can. One other area we asked them to improve is in the way they analyse and use the information they have about you, so it is linked together efficiently to make sure that individual support for you is really well focused. This could help you to do even better, especially in English and mathematics.

You can all help too by continuing to work hard and do your best, and by making sure that you attend regularly.

I wish you every success for the future.

Mary Massey HMI

9 November 2007

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