

Hailsham Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114586
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311653
Inspection date	27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1244
Sixth form	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Williams
Headteacher	Lesley Farmer
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2005
School address	Battle Road Hailsham BN27 1DT
Telephone number	01323 841468
Fax number	01323 848900

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, curriculum, the academic element of care, guidance and support, and leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from discussion with governors, leadership and management, staff and students, school documentation, scrutiny of work and parental responses to a questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Hailsham Community College is the only secondary school in the town and serves a relatively self-contained community. Most students are of White British heritage and very few have English as an additional language. Prior attainment on entry to the college is broadly in line with national averages, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most of which relate to behavioural, emotional and social issues. In 2000, the college achieved specialist status as a sports college and in 2005 added business and enterprise as a second specialism. It is part of an Eastbourne and Hailsham federation, focusing on provision for 14 to 19-year-olds. The college is also currently working with four primary schools in the town on a government field trial to develop a coordinated approach to teaching and learning, academic guidance and pastoral care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a lively, purposeful community that provides a good education for its students and an effective range of resources and opportunities for the town. The principal drives improvement vigorously through the continual re-evaluation and, where appropriate, re-invention of the college's systems and expectations. She has built up a cohesive and committed senior leadership team, ensuring that individuals' capacity to support the college's continuing development is extended through periods of secondment to other schools, opportunities to take on a variety of roles within the college and well directed continuing professional development. Capacity is good and strengthening as the leadership team builds up confidence and experience. Team members point with a justified sense of achievement to developments such as the establishment of a 'core intervention group' that is raising standards in English, mathematics and science, the introduction of diplomas in engineering and construction, and development of an inclusive curriculum. The college's approach to expanding and strengthening leadership skills and experience extends successfully into middle management. Subject leaders, for example, are actively promoting the development of effective ways in which to set challenging targets and to use a range of assessment methods to improve learning. There is a rigorous system for monitoring the quality and impact of teaching, with well targeted support wherever weaknesses are identified. Leadership and management at all levels are good.

Strongly supported by the governing body, which represents the local community well, the principal and members of the senior team have set out a clear vision for the college. This includes broadening sixth form provision so that more students stay on to develop skills and acquire qualifications that match local needs. The college has developed an enterprising range of partnerships with other schools and colleges and with local businesses. It draws successfully on a very extensive spread of professional expertise to add breadth to the curriculum and open up viable training and employment opportunities for the college's leavers. This also strengthens students' understanding of their place within the local community. Curriculum provision is good, especially for those interested in a more vocational and practical preparation for their future economic well-being. Higher attaining students respond with enthusiasm and success to opportunities for early entry to BTEC accreditation. A significant number in the current Year 11 are now working towards the BTEC equivalent of AS and A-level qualifications. This positive development has been given added momentum by the college's sports and enterprise specialisms.

The college rightly judges students' achievement overall as good, boosted by recent improvements in the core subjects. Across Years 7 to 9, and in some subjects in Years 10 and 11, students are taught in ability-based groups and most progress at similar rates but, as the college acknowledges, the most able students are not consistently fulfilling their potential. Appropriate interventions are being put in place to tackle this. However, the college has put in place exceptionally wide-ranging provision to ensure that students of all abilities and aspirations have access to the full curriculum and to all complementary activities. Equality of opportunity is a striking feature of college life and much appreciated by students. Standards are broadly average, showing an upward trend over the past three years. There have been good results recently in mathematics at the end of Year 9, exceeding the college's target and higher than the national average. The proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent has risen steadily over three years and provisional results for 2008 suggest that, at 67%, the college has exceeded expectations. When grades for English and mathematics are taken into account, the proportion falls slightly below the college's target for 2008 but, at 43%,

this provisional result shows a marked increase on the previous year. Students with a very wide range of ability and diverse interests enter the sixth form and make satisfactory progress. Those following BTEC courses make the best progress. Standards in the sixth form are broadly in line with national averages.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Staff morale is high and there is a widely shared commitment to raising standards. Staff and teaching assistants are well supported by a strong programme of professional development. It is currently focusing on effective ways in which to use questioning and feedback in lessons, and to encourage both peer- and self-assessment by students. Almost all the lessons observed were good or better, characterised by lively pace, a variety of approaches to support diverse learning styles, confident subject knowledge, positive relationships between staff and students and well understood, often challenging, objectives. Good assessment methods, while widely used, are not consistently applied and the most able are not always fully challenged, although there is scope for the self-motivated and aspirational to achieve at a high level.

The college provides good care, guidance and support. Safeguarding procedures are robust and relevant training regularly updated. Systems to monitor and improve attendance are thorough and having a positive impact. Students greatly appreciate the prompt, effective support they are given by their mentors. The system of mixed-age mentor groups within a house system strengthens the cohesiveness of the college community, with older students supporting younger ones. House leaders take great pains to ensure that vulnerable individuals are sensitively and steadily supported and they build positive relationships with families. A conspicuous strength of the college is its inclusiveness, not only through the breadth of its curriculum but through its pervasive culture of mutual respect, well modelled by the staff. Academic guidance is less consistently effective. The marking of written work does not always balance encouragement with clear and specific advice on how to improve. The college provides good opportunities for students to build up an informed awareness of global issues, partly through the taught curriculum and partly through visits and exchanges and through links with schools in Africa and China. Students' awareness of community issues within Britain is less well developed.

Students' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development is good. Students enjoy life at the college and are keen to do well. They feel safe, not least because their representatives on the college council play such a key role in establishing practical and effective approaches to behaviour and make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and most make sensible choices. They value the college's specialist sports status, taking advantage of opportunities to participate in a variety of activities and to make a positive contribution to the local community through work with primary schools. While the literacy levels of a proportion of students are limited, the skills and experience developed through the curriculum and through well directed involvement in the local community give students a good preparation for future employment.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good quality of education for its students. Ably supported by members of the senior leadership team, the newly appointed sixth form leader has a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. The college has responded constructively to the abilities and aspirations of its students and shown considerable enterprise in establishing partnerships to complement its own diverse provision of courses. The two specialisms have extended students'

options – through the Football Academy, for example – and fostered a culture of enterprise and achievement. The college is taking appropriate steps to use information about the destinations of leavers to shape curricular planning. The scope of personal, social and health education has been extended to strengthen students' awareness of their place in a multicultural world and to encourage reflection about spiritual and moral values. The prior attainment of a significant number of students on entry to the sixth form is lower than would be expected elsewhere but the college's commitment to being inclusive and supportive in practical ways serves them well. They are encouraged to remain in education and to prepare confidently for future employment. Students make satisfactory progress, supported by regular, developmental feedback from staff. Overall standards are broadly average, with particular strengths in law both at AS and A level.

Fostered by this positive ethos, students' personal development is good. Students take pleasure in achievement and are confident that the college is giving them a secure foundation for the future, including those whose literacy and numeracy skills are relatively limited. They take full advantage of opportunities to make a positive contribution within the college and the local community, developing team working and leadership skills through sports schemes with primary schools. The college's extensive links with further education colleges and local businesses provide a good framework for choices of course and for careers pathways, complementing the guidance provided by students' mentors. Sixth form students make a positive contribution to the life of the college, taking on responsibilities as prefects and leaders of house activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of good practice across the school to raise the standards achieved by all students, including the most able.
- Increase the frequency and detail of written feedback to students to improve their progress.

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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?	1	1
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/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
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 learners' needs?	2	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Hailsham Community College, Hailsham, BN27 1DT

We greatly appreciated your cheerful helpfulness when we visited the college recently to see how well it is doing. Your readiness to show us your work and to explain what life at the college is like made our task much easier and very enjoyable. I am pleased to have this chance to share with you what we found.

We agree with you that the college provides you with a good education. The standards you achieve are broadly in line with national averages and most of you make good progress through Years 7 to 11. Progress in the sixth form is generally in line with national averages. You told us that you value the support you are given by your teachers and your mentors, and that you feel safe and able to achieve qualifications that will enable you to go on to future education, training or employment. We were very impressed by the confidence and sense of purpose conveyed so persuasively by members of the college council and to know that you feel your views are taken seriously. Like you, we could see how much the college is benefiting from its two areas of specialism – sport and business enterprise – and how valuable are the links that the college has developed with other schools and colleges and with local businesses. It was good to hear and to see for ourselves that sixth formers play an important part in the life of the college, as prefects and leaders of house activities.

To help the college build on its present strengths and continue its pattern of improvement, we have asked your principal and her leadership team to do the following things:

- Make sure that the most successful approaches to teaching are spread consistently across the school so that you all do as well as you can, including those of you who find some of the work relatively easy.
- Make sure that your written work is marked even more frequently and that you are given detailed guidance on how to improve.

I look forward to seeing the college go from strength to strength.

With best wishes

Yours faithfully

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector