

Ringmer Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114593
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311656
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	798
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Collins
Headteacher	Kathryn Stonier
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Lewes Road Ringmer Lewes BN8 5RB
Telephone number	01273 812220
Fax number	01273 813961

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Ringmer Community College has achieved specialism in technology and vocational education. Most students are of White British heritage and a very small minority speak a language other than English as their first language. The number of students taking up free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above average. Of these a broadly average proportion has a statement of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving college with some good features. The college is at the heart of its community. Strong partnerships with other agencies and schools benefit students and their families. At the heart of the college is the understanding that, in the words of the principal, 'The adults are here for the children'. Students make satisfactory progress to achieve above-average standards at the end of Year 11. They enjoy and benefit from the rich range of extra-curricular opportunities available to them. The good curriculum is responsive to the diverse needs of students and is flexible in accommodating their choices. The school's specialisms add breadth to the curriculum and impetus to the improvement of teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to express opinions about their college and to be aware of the contribution they make to its improvement. Supportive relationships are an important factor in students' enjoyment of school and positive attitudes to learning. Overall, behaviour is good. There is some low-level disruption in some lessons, usually when teaching fails to engage and stretch students. Most students develop into thoughtful citizens who care about the wider community and the environment. There are good opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the community; the confidence and enthusiasm with which many students embrace them is testament to their good personal development. Most parents have a high regard for the school but a few remain concerned about students' behaviour. The college provides students with a caring environment, successfully nurturing individuality and a sense of belonging. Support for students with additional needs is well coordinated and monitored. However, assessment procedures are not consistent or effective enough in helping students to understand how to improve their work in all subjects. Therefore, care, guidance and support are only satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory but there is wide variation across the college, with some good and outstanding practice. The monitoring of teaching has not given enough emphasis to learning and progress. The school rightly recognises the need to develop further the skills of assessing students' learning in lessons and accelerating their progress by setting precise targets about how to improve in subjects. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, and most effective at senior level. The strong leadership of the principal stems from a clear vision of success that is being realised in the development of the curriculum and the plans for sixth form provision. A cohesive, hardworking senior team provides her with good support. Self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths and areas for development but has not been linked tightly enough to students' achievement. Consequently, some judgements have been over-generous. There is successful leadership of some subjects. However, the unevenness in students' performance and rate of progress reflects inconsistencies in the quality of leadership across the school. Addressing this issue is central to increasing the school's capacity for further improvement from satisfactory to good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching by sharing best practice and concentrating on how effectively teaching helps students to learn.
- Develop self-evaluation at all levels, with a sharp focus on students' achievement.
- Make sure teachers and learning support staff use assessment information to accelerate students' progress, particularly in Key Stage 3, by matching learning objectives to their needs and setting precise targets for improvement in all subjects. A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join the school with broadly average attainment, but generally with more above average than below, to achieve standards that just reach the national average at the end of Year 9. This represents relatively slow progress. However, progress accelerates from Year 9 to the end of Year 11, where students achieve aboveaverage standards. Consequently, from Year 7 to Year 11, students make at least satisfactory progress. The results of 2007 national tests at the end of Year 9 show some underachievement in English, mathematics and science; the college did not meet its targets. The proportion of students achieving five higher-grade GCSEs increased significantly in 2007, as did the proportion including English and mathematics amongst the five. Both of these headline figures were above the national average. Whilst ground was gained in Key Stage 4, there was still some underachievement in English and mathematics, particularly amongst the more able students. There was also some unevenness in students' performance across subjects. Current assessment information suggests the college is on track to achieve its adequately challenging targets in 2008. However, there are issues about teachers' understanding of national curriculum levels that have not been fully resolved; lesson observations during the inspection revealed that learning objectives are not always sufficiently challenging. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in relation to their peers. Generally, girls' performance is stronger than that of boys but the college is implementing strategies that are improving boys' achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good, attendance is satisfactory and many students enjoy school, describing it as a 'happy, friendly place'. Relationships between staff and students are good. There has been a marked improvement in behaviour since the last inspection and the number of exclusions has dropped. The college is increasingly effective in helping students most vulnerable to life's challenges to find their place and succeed. Students feel safe in school and are appreciative of the individual care they receive through the house system; they feel bullying is dealt with promptly and effectively by house leaders. Students themselves support and contribute to a number of good anti-bullying projects. Opportunities for leadership and responsibility are popular. Increasing numbers of students enjoy positions of responsibility, and over 200 are 'eco-representatives' who play an active role in improving and developing a sustainable environment. This awareness extends beyond the college and many students are conscientious in making a positive contribution to the well-being of the wider community. The student council is an integral component of college life and reinforces the positive interactions between students throughout the college. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good and reinforced through the curriculum and assemblies. Students adopt healthy lifestyles; they know how to choose healthy options in the canteen and they participate enthusiastically in sport. They are developing the skills to be effective in their working lives and are proud of their college's achievements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning varies widely. Teaching is more effective in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. This is reflected in the better progress made by the older students. The college is aware of this difference but has not succeeded in ensuring teaching in Years 7 to 9 results in students making good progress. Good relationships are an important factor in students' enjoyment of learning. The most effective teaching is characterised by good pace, high expectations requiring students to extend their thinking, planning which matches learning objectives to students' needs, opportunities for applying learning and working independently and, importantly, precise feedback that enables students to take the next step in learning in a timely way. Not all teaching is of this quality. Some teachers are too focused on the activity of teaching rather than how well students are learning. Learning objectives are not always challenging enough. Planning is sometimes restricted to the content and structure of the lesson, at the expense of finely tuned assessment opportunities and appropriate challenge. There is a lack of consistency in the quality and regularity of marking. Consequently, some books are scruffy and work is poorly presented or incomplete. Too often, feedback fails to clarify how students can improve subject skills, knowledge and understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

In recent years the school has focused successfully on curriculum design and development. The outcome is a greatly improved range of courses more suited to students' needs and interests. Specialist status has made a valuable contribution to this process and to raising standards. In Key Stage 3, the college is working towards a competency-based curriculum to equip students with the skills needed for independent learning, but it is at the outset of this part of the journey. Developments in Key Stage 4 are much further advanced. A thriving partnership with other schools and further education colleges has allowed the college to extend the choices and range of qualifications available to students. There is a good range of vocational courses and personalised programmes for some students where the mainstream curriculum is inappropriate. The flexibility and breadth of the curriculum is motivating students and sustaining their commitment to learning. The college now fulfils the requirement of the National Curriculum to provide religious education for all students, entering its first cohort for the short course at GCSE last year with good results. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not part of the core curriculum at present but there are plans to reinstate it next year. The college has mapped out appropriate pathways for its students from age 14 to 19 as part of its planned expansion into sixth form provision in September 2008. It has taken the lead in the local consortium in working with other institutions to introduce a number of the new vocational diploma courses. A strength of the college is its enthusiasm for the sustainable technology and environmental projects that permeate the curriculum and capture the imagination of students. The curriculum is enriched further by an impressive choice of extracurricular activities. These are very popular with students, half of whom are learning instruments and enjoy performing in the numerous concerts and productions that take place during the school year. The college is developing an international dimension to the curriculum and, to this end, is building relationships with schools in Spain, Czechoslovakia and South Africa.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Concern for the welfare of individual students is at the heart of the college's ethos, and hence the quality of pastoral care is good. Parents agree that the college makes effective arrangements to look after their children. Outreach work in local primary schools ensures children settle into college life well. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are in place and monitored robustly. Health and safety checks, for instance, in connection with the premises, are rigorous. A recent innovation is a daily mentoring session where mixed-age groups come together with their mentor. The quality of these half-hour sessions is variable; some are effective in supporting students' emotional well-being and developing their social skill but others lack purpose and structure. The mentoring programme includes opportunities for students to agree personal and academic targets with their mentors. However, guidance gives insufficient focus to improving subject skills and knowledge. This limits the impact of target setting on students' progress and learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The college judged these aspects of its work to be good but did not give enough weight to the impact of leadership on students' achievement and to the variation in the quality of leadership across the college. The principal is bold in her ambitions and has the drive to take the college forward. The pace of improvement is gathering momentum. New structures are establishing themselves and beginning to make an impact. For example, the house system has contributed to the improvement in student attitudes. Middle leaders are being involved in self-evaluation. However, in some instances there is a lack of rigour in the use of assessment information to plan and evaluate students' learning. In addition, target setting is not used well in all subjects or in mentor time to speedily remedy underachievement. There is more to do in establishing common approaches to improving learning and sharing good practice. Regular line management procedures are making teachers more accountable for students' progress. Teamwork is becoming a strength; teachers and support staff work well together to achieve common goals. Good opportunities for professional development link to the college improvement plan as well as to the individual needs of staff. However, not all staff are secure in their understanding of National Curriculum levels and how to evaluate and support students' progress in relationship to them. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very committed to the school and support its work enthusiastically. They attend training and are developing their skills in interrogating information about students' achievement but have not given a sharp enough focus to tackling underachievement.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
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?	3
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?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

- 1 February 2008 Dear Students Inspection of Ringmer Community College, Lewes BN8 5RB
Thank you for talking to us so honestly about the school and the progress you are making. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it. We found your college provides you with a satisfactory and improving education. The college has good points that it continues to build on and some areas for development that it is determined to tackle. You have an important part to play. You are doing better in examinations at the end of Year 11 but not so well in national tests at the end of Year 9. Our view is that when your attention is captured by good teaching closely matched to your needs, you make good progress. Where lessons do not challenge you appropriately, your progress slows down. In addition, some of your targets do not give you clear and detailed guidance about how to improve in subjects. Overall, your achievement is satisfactory. You get on well with each other, are keen to take responsibility for decision making in the college and have good opportunities to do just that. We were impressed with the contribution you make in the wider community and by your commitment to sustainable technologies and improving the environment. You are well cared for, feel safe, enjoy college and greatly appreciate the impressive range of extra activities available to you. There is a good choice of subjects to study in Key Stage 4 and some of you are looking forward to joining the new sixth form. There is room for improvement in the curriculum in Key Stage 3, which is still being developed. The principal and governors are determined to keep on improving the college. We have asked them to prioritise the following things:
 - increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching by sharing best practice and concentrating on how effectively teaching helps you to learn
 - link judgements about the effectiveness of the college to how well you learn and progress
 - make sure teachers and learning support staff use assessment information to match learning objectives to your needs and set you clear targets for improving your subject skills and knowledge. With very best wishes for the future, Jacqueline White Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

1 February 2008

Dear Students

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With very best wishes for the future,

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector