

Castle Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118825
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313105
Inspection date	8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	619
6th form	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sylvia Jones
Headteacher	Christine Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2002
School address	Mill Road Deal CT14 9BD
Telephone number	01304 373363
Fax number	01304 380769

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following issues: progress in English to increase the percentage of students who attain five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics; the key factors explaining the school's significant improvements and growth since the last inspection; and the overall effectiveness of the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from details of current standards and achievement; examination of students' work and school documents; observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities; analysis of parents' questionnaires; and discussions with staff, including the principal and senior members, and with students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This small sports specialist college has increased in size since the last inspection, both in the main school and in the sixth form. The college is a member of the Deal and Sandwich Post-16 consortium. A small unit supports physically disabled students, who are mainly in lessons with other students. Over one third of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is well above average, as is the percentage of students with statements of special educational needs.

An above-average percentage of students take free school meals, reflecting the economic and rural disadvantage in several local areas. Standards on entry are well below average. The college has been designated an Extended School, has Healthy School status and the Artsmark Gold award. On site, the college supports adult education, youth and community facilities and a nursery.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Castle Community College is an outstanding school because at the same time as helping students to mature into well-behaved and thoughtful young people, teaching is so effective that students make excellent progress in their studies. The principal's energetic and thoughtful leadership is a key factor in the school's success, and the senior leadership team and many middle managers and pastoral leaders are equally strong.

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Students enter the school with well-below-average standards, particularly in reading. After five years they attain a well-above-average percentage of five A* to C grades, representing remarkable achievement in both BTECs and GCSEs. The college exceeded its 2007 target and all those for its specialism too. The area where it did not do well enough in 2007 was in the percentage attaining grade C or higher in both English and mathematics; English results were not as good as those in mathematics, which have gone up in recent years.

It was staffing problems that resulted in 2007 Year 11 students producing poor coursework and lacking understanding of the writing skills needed to tackle the English language examination. The new head of English, who took up post in January 2007, has successfully sorted out these problems, providing high quality, focused support for students who have yet to achieve their best. End-of-Year 9 English test results were well above the predicted levels in 2007.

GCSE science results improved dramatically in 2007 and were above average. Technology results were most impressive; for example, over 80% of students attained grades A* to C in food studies. Few students study French for GCSE but many of them enjoy their lessons in Years 7 to 9.

Students feel confident that they are taught really well, observing, for example, that 'some of the lessons are absolutely brilliantly planned'. Lessons are characterised by starters that catch students' interest, questions that extend their thinking, several different activities undertaken at pace and good reflection on what has been learned at the end. In mathematics, particularly, teachers use the interactive whiteboard imaginatively. Several students have recently been trained to observe lessons and one teacher is already welcoming feedback on whether his lessons have been interesting and clear. Such openness reflects the respect between teachers and students, which contributes to the excellent learning.

The compulsory vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 contribute to the school's success. The curriculum is outstanding as it is relevant to students' interests and, in the light of local job opportunities, to their further training and education. Training opportunities and alternative options for those students who find academic work hard are very good. The number of disaffected students, mainly boys, is low and every effort is made to encourage them to achieve by negotiating a curriculum they want to follow; the gap between boys' and girls' results is not significant and narrowing. The college is aware that further development is needed in the provision for citizenship and for using computers in lessons in all subjects.

The principal describes the college as 'not a shouting school but supportive and kind'. This is clear from the cheerful atmosphere, the respectful relationships at all levels and the buzz of enjoyment. Students feel very safe and attendance is average and rising. Intensive work and liaison with primary school pupils means that they start secondary school confidently and 'painlessly'. Bullying does happen but parents and students are confident it is dealt with quickly and sympathetically. Racial incidents are very rare.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is excellent. Assemblies and form times are taken seriously and students respond well. A minute's silence was observed respectfully by Year 11 students during a Remembrance assembly, which included well-chosen music, a powerful video and contributions from ex-servicemen members of staff. Students speak to visitors confidently, behave very well and are polite and attentive. Social skills are nurtured and reinforced throughout students' time at college. In addition to topics studied in personal, social and health education and religious education, links with schools in Europe and Africa strengthen students' understanding of different cultures.

The college analyses data about students' performance meticulously and then supports underachieving students through a wide range of relevant strategies. Before, during and after school, students attend either individual or group sessions to improve whatever they need, for example, their reading, numeracy, coursework, confidence or self-esteem. Gifted and talented students are provided for increasingly well, with outings and extra activities.

The college's physically disabled students are totally integrated into school life, as are those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They receive excellent care and support from a wide variety of sources, both internal and external. A hospital report on a student with a statement reported significantly improved performance, in part because of excellent teaching at the college. However, targets in the individual education plans for those with statements of special educational needs are not as precise and short term as they could be to encourage optimum progress.

Parents' attendance at review meetings is very high, a further factor contributing to students' success. Many attend the impressive performances and shows put on by the college. About one quarter of the parents responded to the inspection questionnaire and the vast majority were extremely positive about all aspects of school life: 'My son is doing really well thanks to fantastic teaching', 'Great', 'I cannot praise the principal and her team enough', 'Communication is excellent'.

The sports and performing arts facilities are of a high standard and used extensively by local primary schools and numerous clubs; the college's specialism has benefited the local community significantly. Students take more exercise than in many schools and, sensibly, the college lets them choose activities that they want to do and hence they participate enthusiastically – girls in dance or boys in golf, for example. In addition, again reflecting the school's specialism, a high percentage of Year 11 students also take a qualification in some physical activity or performing arts subject, with 100% pass rates in 2007.

Students fully understand the importance of leading active and healthy lives and receive valuable education about drugs, sex education and relationships. They benefit from work experience and enterprise activities, for example, being given £1 which they have to use to generate funds for charity. Their participation in school and community life, particularly through sports, performing arts and the vocational courses, is excellent. They acknowledge that the careers advice and guidance they have, both before and after the sixth form, is helpful and practical.

The growth in non-teaching staff has been significantly beneficial in giving students superb pastoral and academic care and guidance. The principal describes these members of the community as her 'secret weapon' as not only do they do an excellent job but also their presence means that teachers can focus on what happens in the classroom. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are followed meticulously so, for example, staff keep a careful eye on looked-after students or those who are carers.

The college rightly describes its 'big challenges' as literacy, numeracy and developing further the culture of high aspirations. It knows its strong points and areas for development very well and plans realistically to improve the latter. An exciting development is in e-learning, which will mean that students and parents can access materials at home. The college has tackled the issues from its previous inspection successfully and has a very strong capacity to improve further.

Governors are fully involved in all aspects of the college's life and take an interest in quite specific aspects, for example, the effectiveness of boy/girl seating. They have a wealth of relevant experience which they contribute to their deliberations and support for the college's development. They do not shy away from asking probing questions when they have any concerns about the college's development.

The qualities that make this college so effective are encapsulated by a parent's observation: 'The balance of encouragement, enthusiasm and sensible boundaries in this school is truly exceptional – they found my child's strengths, lifted them up and everything fell into place.'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

With an interesting and increasing range of vocational and academic subjects, more students are staying on into this good sixth form and benefiting from the supportive environment, combined with very good teaching. A few students elect to join the sixth form from other schools. Above-average results in vocational courses show that students make very good progress and results in A level law, which is increasingly popular and now taught on site, are also good. Students benefit from studying an additional AS course, either general studies, psychology or sociology.

Students are thoughtful and kind, mentoring or helping younger ones with reading and undertaking voluntary work in the local community – in primary schools or old people's care homes, for example. They are good role models, with many of them participating in performances and sporting activities in an accomplished and mature way.

Analysis and use of data have improved since the last inspection, with the head of sixth form monitoring standards and progress carefully. Leadership and management of the sixth form are now excellent and the quality of care and guidance is as strong as in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English language in all years and increase the percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics.

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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?	1	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	1	1

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	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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?	1	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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	1	
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 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

9 November 2007

Dear students

Inspection of Castle Community College, Mill Road, Deal, Kent CT14 9BD

Thank you so much for being so welcoming when we visited your college. We did enjoy meeting you and wished we had had more time to talk to more of you. We are sure your parents, and you too we hope, will not be surprised to hear that we have described Castle Community as an outstanding college because you are taught so very well, you make excellent progress and also mature into thoughtful and considerate young people.

We were particularly impressed with how well you behave and how hard you all work in lessons – well, practically all of you! It is great that you do so much sport and performing arts because they keep you healthy and you obviously enjoy them. It is also excellent that the facilities are used by so many people in the local community. You benefit the community, too, by putting on performances, joining in sporting activities and, especially sixth formers, by doing voluntary work.

The GCSE, and quite a few of the sixth-form results, were fantastic this year so it is not surprising that the local press praised the college's success. The only thing that was not good enough was the percentage of five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. If you have read the national press recently, you will have seen that Gordon Brown is very keen for all schools to do better in this measure. So, we have asked the College to focus on improving English results and to keep pushing mathematics standards up too. You can play your part here, especially by making your writing as good as possible, which will help you in all subjects.

The success of the college is down to Mrs Chapman's excellent and kind leadership and her strong desire, shared by all staff and the governors, that each and every one of you will gain useful qualifications and proceed into worthwhile jobs, training or more education. Make the most of your time at Castle Community because you are lucky to be students there.

Have a wonderful Christmas break when it comes and best wishes for your futures.

Clare Gillies Lead inspector

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