

# Ickniel Community College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123244
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	314552
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	568
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Francesca Holmes-Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Richard Hudson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 April 2005
<b>School address</b>	Love Lane Watlington OX49 5RB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01491 612691
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<b>Age group</b>	11-16
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Icknield Community College, a designated specialist humanities school, is much smaller than most comprehensive schools. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and very few pupils speak English as a second language. Traditionally, a small minority of the intake comes from the locally based RAF Benson. The percentage of students from the RAF varies each year, but this is set to increase in 2009. The proportion of pupils with a disability and/or learning need is average, although this varies in year groups, with Year 11 having the smallest number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but the highest number of stated students. In 2008, the school became the Royal Shakespeare Company regional winner and it holds the following awards: Artsmark, Sportsmark, and Investor in People, Healthy Schools and Eco Schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Icknield Community College provides a good quality education for its students. This message comes across strongly from parents and students alike. The fairly large and positive responses to the parental questionnaire and discussion group, confirm that the majority of parents are proud that their children attend the school. Parents wrote and spoke highly about the inclusive ethos, which contributes to nurturing their children to develop into well-rounded young people. One parent said, 'The students accept each other as they are...the year groups are quite tight'. Another parent corroborated this evidence by quoting her child who said, 'Everyone is different but you can never judge a book by its colour, we are all so amazingly different but we all get on so very well'. Socially, and academically, students are enabled to succeed because the quality of care is very good. Good communication and partnership work with parents has strengthened the school's reputation in the local community and increased their support for the school, which they describe as a village, where their children are safe, happy and achieve well.

Students' personal development and well-being, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Enjoyment is evident in lessons and students spoke compellingly and proudly about their school. Attendance is in line with the national average. Attitudes and behaviour are good with some exemplary features. Students develop experiences of voicing their opinions and formulating policies by seizing opportunities to influence decisions such as evaluating teaching and learning and re-writing the behaviour policy. These experiences help them to become thoughtful and reflective young people and are a good basis for life beyond school.

Standards are in line with the national average and have improved significantly since the last inspection. The percentage of students achieving 5 A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics, has been in line with or above the national and local averages for the last three years. However, the 2007 results were lower because under one-third of the Year 11 who were enrolled on linked college courses did not meet expectations and external factors governing the provision of the courses were immediately beyond the school's control. Additionally, fewer students than expected obtained the top GCSE grades of A\* or A. Although results were depressed in 2007, assessment information and inspection evidence show good achievement overall, for students as they progress from Year 7 to Year 11.

Standards are continuing to rise because of the increased focus on developing the quality of teaching and learning, which is good. Achievement is good because the school has high expectations of what each student can achieve. This is increasingly linked to the robust use of the school's assessment data and monitoring systems to identify and deal swiftly with students likely to fall short of meeting expectations. Current initiatives to use the school's specialist humanities status to raise standards are successfully employed in English, drama and geography, where each subject has exceeded or met set targets. Further work is planned to extend new teaching techniques to other subjects to bring them to the level of the specialist subjects.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good, with strengths in how students critically use self and peer assessment to improve their work. Robust action has been taken to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. However, at this stage, not all departments use assessment data consistently.

Students are well served by a flexible curriculum that provides them with various progression routes linked to their needs and aspirations. There are good opportunities for students to take

responsibility and participate in extension activities but the take up rate is curtailed by the lack of available public transport when students stay after school, which limits the amount of time students can reasonably stay after school. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

The exemplary leadership of the headteacher underpins the effectiveness of the school. He has successfully increased the standing of the school locally and manoeuvred it to a position where staff are asked to share good practice and act as consultants within the new and loosely federated group of schools, including primary schools. For example, the English and drama department have improved their specialism and are recognised as centres of excellence through their work with the Royal Shakespeare Company. The creation of the new faculty, Wider World, is broadening students' horizons of diverse communities. This, when combined with the increased accountability at all levels, aims to prepare students well for challenges in the twenty-first century. There are good opportunities for middle managers to have well considered senior management experience. This motivates staff to welcome new practices and adopt their approaches for the benefit of students. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and fulfil their statutory duties well. They challenge the school's provision, and compare results to determine the school's achievement. They ensure that legislative requirements in relation to equal opportunities are updated and implemented in accordance with requirements.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Increase the percentage of able students achieving the top grades in all subjects.
- Develop and apply good practice in teaching and assessment across all subjects in order to ensure consistency and raise standards further.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The overall attainment on entry to Year 7 is average. Standards have risen significantly since the last inspection, and in 2006, the school achieved its best results in the last four years when students attained above average standards in Years 9 and 11. The 2007 results were slightly lower than the previous year's. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, students reached standards that were average in English, mathematics and science. Progress was good in science and satisfactory in English and mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of students obtaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C, including English and mathematics was slightly above average with particularly good performance in the latter subject. Students' performance was particularly good in geography, music, art and design, some of the leading specialist subjects.

In 2007, the overall progress of Year 11 students was affected when a significant minority of the cohort did not achieve their target grade as expected in the external vocational courses. Detailed analysis of students' performance found that the techniques used to run the external courses were not well matched to their needs. The school has acted swiftly and provided suitable alternative provision for students pursuing vocational courses. The school's current assessments of students' work and evidence from work seen in lessons show that most students are making good progress and are on track to reach or exceed their challenging targets. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress because of the good support they receive. The relatively small number of minority ethnic students makes similar progress to their peers with a few performing well above average in comparison with their peers.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students say that they enjoy coming to school and settle in quickly when they enter. They feel safe and well supported by staff. There are good relationships between students and adults and amongst the students themselves, which support a pleasant and vibrant learning environment. Behaviour is good, and often exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. However, a small number of students who lack self-control occasionally mar a few lessons, although staff deal with this effectively including incidences of bullying which are rare. The number of exclusions has remained consistent during the last three years and the recent increase is linked to a few students who transgress repeatedly.

Students make a very strong contribution to the school and wider community. For example, elected members participate in the school council with great enthusiasm and appointed prefects perform their duties with confidence and poise. They are effectively involved in fund raising events and in the 'environment watch'. Senior students acquire good leadership skills through participating in and obtaining the Junior Sports Leader Award and use their expertise well to work with primary school children. As recent winners of the Royal Shakespeare Company competition, students performed successfully in Stratford-on-Avon. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is well supported by the personal development and citizenship programme. Cultural development is a strength with many opportunities for students to learn about their own and other cultures. Leavers are well prepared for further study, employment and the world of commerce. There is strong awareness among students of the benefits of healthy life styles.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and present well-structured lessons enabling students to use a variety of learning styles. As a result, students display a confident approach to work and make good progress. Short starter activities ensure a prompt start and brisk pace at the beginning of lessons. The pace is adjusted accordingly to suit the needs and abilities of students as the lessons progress. Summary sessions at the ends of lessons are used well to consolidate learning. Very good student teacher relationships and stimulating activities result in good behaviour and attitudes, with the majority of students on task throughout the lesson. Students work well collaboratively and with enthusiasm. On the few occasions where behaviour is unacceptable, staff deal with the situation efficiently and effectively. There is very good support for students with learning difficulties who make good progress but extension tasks are not always available for those who are gifted and talented. ICT is used effectively in all subjects. Displays of work and key words help students to consolidate their learning but not all departments provide information on strategies to help them understand how they can achieve a higher level or grade. Homework is set and marked regularly. Students are aware of assessment criteria for individual pieces of work, and carry out both self and peer assessment. Targets are often used well to focus attention on what students can achieve but this is not consistent across all subject areas.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good curriculum, which meets the needs of students very well and is constantly evaluated. The school has become a focus for good practice in English, drama and geography because of its specialist status in the humanities. Good links with the Royal Shakespeare Company have given the school a high profile locally because of the enrichment of the drama programme and the successful use of drama in some other areas of the curriculum. Despite the comparatively small size of the school, students in Key Stage 4 are able to choose from a good and appropriate range of academic and vocational courses, which are matched to their abilities and interests. Effective partnership arrangements contribute well to a flexible curriculum at Key Stage 4. Although there is some good provision for gifted and talented students, such as early GCSE entry for exams such as critical thinking and enrichment visits, there is insufficient focus on the achievement of more able pupils across the curriculum. The curriculum is well supported by theme days dedicated to enterprise and economic awareness. It is further enhanced by a wide range of subject related visits and trips abroad which have recently included Iceland. Participation in a wide range of after school activities is sometimes constrained by transport difficulties.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of care guidance and support provided by the school is good and contributes significantly to the personal development of students. Good academic guidance and regularly marked books, for example, in English and geography, contribute to students knowing what they need to do next to improve. The quality of marking and guidance is not consistent in all curriculum areas. Tutors know their students well and monitor their well-being on a daily basis. Students with learning difficulties appreciate the assistance they receive from staff but provision for those who are gifted and talented is not consistent across the school leading to a lack of challenge for some. Attendance is satisfactory and is adversely affected by rural factors such as difficulties with bussing. Nevertheless, staff continue to work on various strategies to bring further improvement. Arrangements for safeguarding students are secure. The school makes good use of a range of outside agencies who offer valuable support to students and a comprehensive programme of careers education is in place in all years. Healthy lifestyles are well promoted through teaching programmes and the healthy eating options available in the canteen.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher is committed to improving the life chances of students and has successfully communicated his vision to the senior team and all staff. In turn, he has won the loyalty and commitment of all staff to the school and has the very able support of the senior team and middle managers. Despite the financial constraints, the headteacher has carefully balanced the demands of pressures to improve the school's results and learning environment on a deficit budget through prudent management. Although results and the accommodation are much improved, the deficit budget, linked to the small size of the school, has seriously affected the workload of the senior team. Since the last inspection, their high level of teaching commitment

has not changed significantly. This has compromised their role, as they are unable to dedicate more time to managing some aspects of the school's work. The school's likely budget prospects are expected to improve in September 2008 when there will be an increase in the new intake.

The recent restructuring of the senior team has created a unified approach and increased the accountability and professional development of middle leaders. Regular link meetings and the new faculty structure provide a useful forum to exchange and develop good practice. However, the school has yet to ensure that link meetings are evaluated and reflect all of the priorities for improvement. Governors are supportive and work effectively with the school but at this stage, a representative has not been assigned to monitor the application of equal opportunities across the school. There is too much reliance on the school's staff to do this.



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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?	2
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	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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	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?	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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
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 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

19 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Icknield Community College, Watlington, OX49 5RB

We were delighted to meet members of the school council, individuals and groups as well as a large group of parents during the inspection of your school on 4 - 5 June 2008. The inspection team was impressed with your attitudes, behaviour and, most of all, the pride and loyalty you expressed when talking about your school. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about why Icknield Community College means so much to you and the community.

The school is providing you with a good education. Standards have risen each year since the last inspection, and most of you are gaining good GCSE grades. Well done. The progress that you make is good because the quality of teaching is good and is set to get better. This is because your teachers insist that you should all believe that you can achieve the set challenges. All of this has been possible because of the good quality care, guidance and support available in lessons. Parents told us that the quality of care is unique. The inspection team agrees with this view. The teachers know you all very well and relationships are very good. Although the school is small, the staff have successfully provided you with a good quality curriculum that meets your interests and is preparing you well for the world of work, understanding the global community and the diverse range of cultures in the community and country.

Mr Hudson has really championed the school in the community and has been well supported by the other senior leaders and all staff. This has really increased the school's reputation and profile in the community. The senior leaders, governors and staff feel that the provision could be even better and will be working with you to make sure that more of you achieve more of the highest levels in the national tests and the top grades GCSE A\*/A in all subjects. The staff will be concentrating on developing some of the good teaching practices seen during the inspection so that more of you can achieve even better grades.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector