

Parkside Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110864
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325243
Inspection date	1 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Middleton HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	604
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Mark Carrington
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Hutchinson
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	Parkside Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB1 1EH
Telephone number	01223 712600
Fax number	01223 712601

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issue: the impact of the school's mission to collaborate and innovate in order to achieve excellence for all. Evidence was gathered through review of school documentation, discussions with senior leaders, other staff, students, and the chair of governors, together with visits to lessons and extended school activities. All aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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 in this report.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary school. The majority of students are White British. Over a quarter are from minority ethnic groups. More students speak English as an additional language than average. Fewer students are eligible for free school meals than average. The proportions of students who find learning difficult or have a statement of educational need are average. The school has several achievement awards, for example: Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools, International Schools Award, Investors in People. The school became a Specialist Media Arts College in 1997 and was redesignated a Specialist Languages College in 2007. It became a Foundation School in 2004 and in 2005 the school formed the Parkside Federation with a neighbouring school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parkside Community College provides an outstanding standard of education. The commitment of staff, students and parents contributes to an excellent ethos for learning. Effective collaboration with other agencies and educational settings in the area, enables the students to develop and deepen a wide range of knowledge, interests and aspirations. Forward thinking leadership and judicious management, supported by teachers who are ambitious for their students and subject, ensure that lessons are intensive and innovative. Students value their identity within a small school but are confident that collaboration widens their choices and enriches their experiences.

Students' enter the school with educational standards that, although covering a very wide range, are already above average overall. When tested at the end of Year 9 standards are well above average. By the end of Year 11 standards are consistently high in relation to the national average of students achieving five or more higher grades at GCSE. In 2007 students made outstanding progress in relation to their starting points, putting the school in the top 2% of schools nationally. The school's assessment information indicates that in 2008 standards continued to rise. Detailed tracking of individual students' progress also reveals that those with particular gifts or talents and those who find learning difficult, progress equally well to achieve challenging personal targets.

Curriculum innovation has moved inclusion in the school forward, enabling students with a wider range of abilities and aptitudes to succeed. The curriculum, and achievement and standards, judged good at the last inspection are now outstanding. In particular, the choice of vocationally related options including the new Creative and Media Diploma has complemented the good range of academic qualifications and achievement awards already established. Effective collaboration with partner schools, higher education institutions and employers has contributed to the positivity and participation of students taking these courses. Many parents who responded to the questionnaire also supported the personalisation of the curriculum. However, a small minority expressed concerns about federation and the flexibility of the timetable.

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall and lead to excellence in most subjects. Senior leaders promote a strong focus on learning with an emphasis on well planned lessons that set clear challenges for all abilities. Teachers and support staff observed during visits to lessons engaged students through provocative discussion and collaborative activity between students with different abilities. Students are confident about taking risks and responsibility, reassured by their teachers' expertise. In a science lesson, collaboration between the teacher, specialist support staff and student leaders succeeded in creating a climate for enquiry and invention. In a dance lesson, confident students were challenged by the teacher to push the boundaries of their creativity by responding to her expert modelling and use of other students' skills of improvisation and interpretation.

Students' personal development is a strength because the school's expectations are clear and consistently high from the start, evident in the participation of all students in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Year 7 students had enjoyed contact with the school before starting, including challenges set in some subjects. Their learning mentors were quick to give value to students' successes in primary school by inviting students to share their experiences and achievements. However, information about the personal qualities that students bring to the school community are not as systematically gathered and used as assessment data and special

needs information is. Students are exceptionally well aware of how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They are supportive of each other and report few problems with their peers. As they progress through the school their high achievement, confident social skills and independence equip them well for their future working lives. The exception is a small but significant proportion of students whose attendance record is below average.

Support, care and guidance are outstanding. The school fulfils all requirements for the safeguarding of students. Their well-being underpins school policies, practice and improvement priorities. The professionalism of teachers' relationships with students is a strong feature of their work. Collaboration between teachers, students and their parents is enhanced by carefully considered innovations such as personalised learning plans, weekly surgeries for parents and students, an informative website and learning mentors who provide every student with objective oversight of their progress. Although at an early stage of implementation, these strategies exemplify the schools' determination to ensure that 'every child matters'. However, students' preparation for the future could still be better informed by drawing together their strengths and weaknesses more systematically across different subjects and aspects.

Overall, the school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Students contribute within school by developing cooperative relationships and responsible attitudes within the clear guidelines set by staff. The school's effective use of outside agencies and integration with other schools through specialist status and federation, promotes collaboration with the local community. Local links add to the quality of students' education, for example by widening their opportunities to work with others whilst at school, and contributing to guidance about life after Parkside. However, the school has identified links with adults in the community an area for improvement. Also, whilst there is strong evidence of students' awareness of the global community through international links, the national context is not promoted as explicitly.

The outstanding leadership of the principal, senior staff and governors, is characterised by challenging targets supported by innovative strategies to achieve or exceed them. There is no complacency about existing high levels of achievement. High expectations have contributed strongly to the school's continuing improvement. The school's evaluation of its performance is accurate and based on a comprehensive range of evidence including systematic monitoring. Prioritisation and the deployment of resources are clearly informed by a focus on maximising the potential of students and staff. The use of specialist status as a driver for innovation and sustained improvement is highly effective. The school is very well placed to build on the excellent reputation and achievements of its staff and students: it has exceptional capacity for continued improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the level of unauthorised absence in order to improve attendance.
- Develop the role of the learning mentor in order to maximise students' strengths and minimise any barriers to progress across different subjects.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

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

2 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Parkside Community College, Cambridge CB1 1EH

Thank you for welcoming me into your school. I appreciated the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in discussion groups, lessons and during activities after school. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in evaluating the evidence provided by staff and confirming their view that Parkside is an outstanding school.

Particular strengths of your school:

- you enjoy the ethos of a small school and value the resources of the federation
- your school is led and managed innovatively, collaboratively and effectively
- your school focuses well on your individual learning, progress and achievements
- you have an excellent choice of courses and extra-curricular opportunities
- you attain high standards of work, examination results and other achievements
- your relationships with teachers and peers are mutually respectful and supportive
- your parents, carers and the governors are ambitious for you and your school
- you appreciate and receive high quality care, guidance and support from staff.

The issues I have asked your school to address:

- improve attendance
- develop the role of the learning mentor.

I wish you continued enjoyment and achievement at Parkside Community College.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton

Her Majesty's Inspector