

Cottenham Village College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110867
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325245
Inspection date	7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	900
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Harradine
Headteacher	Mr Tony Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2006
School address	High Street Cottenham Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB4 8UA
Telephone number	01954 288944
Fax number	01954 288949

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, as well as students' personal development and well-being, their achievement and standards of work, and the curriculum. The quality of leadership and management, of teaching and of care, guidance and support were also evaluated. Evidence came from observations of the school at work, the school's data and interviews with members of the school staff and with students.

Description of the school

The proportions of students who are eligible for free school meals, who are from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language are all considerably lower than is found nationally. The proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than nationally, partly because the school has a unit for students who have a hearing or language impairment.

The school is a specialist school for mathematics and computing and has recently been awarded a second specialism, for applied learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cottenham Village College is a good school with outstanding features. Students' development is good, both academically and personally. Attendance and behaviour are good and students feel safe in school. They are taught well and benefit from an outstanding curriculum.

In most years, when students join the school, the standards they have reached in their work are in line with the national average. By the time they leave in Year 11 their standards are above average. This shows that they make good progress. In the GCSE results in 2008, taking students at all levels of ability into account, standards and achievement are above average. The proportion who achieved five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is also above the national average. Although the standards reached by girls are higher than by boys, the difference is less than is found nationally. Students who find learning more difficult and those with learning disabilities make good progress.

The evidence seen in lessons and students' work during the inspection confirmed that students make good progress. They do so because they are taught well and the data from the school's regular formal assessments are used well to check that students are making the progress they should be. Teachers have good subject knowledge. There is a good variety of teaching approaches. Students who find learning more difficult are well supported. The result is that students are keen to learn, they behave well in lessons and work at a good pace. Relationships between students and their teachers are good. While teachers' questions are used extensively, and usefully, in teaching, their use to ensure that those at the extremes of the ability range are challenged or supported is inconsistent. Questions are also not used consistently to assess if students have understood the work, so that the teaching approach can be modified if necessary. During the inspection most questions were asked of those students who were volunteering to answer, which does not allow this assessment.

A good variety of assessment approaches is used and subject departments maintain detailed records. This enables them to not only identify which students may not be making the required progress, but also in some cases to identify which particular aspect of the work students may be finding more difficult. In English, for example, this has led to a reconsideration of how some work is taught. The school's senior leaders also monitor progress by means of a whole school tracking system and use this in their discussions with subject leaders. Senior leaders monitor the progress being made in different subjects effectively and this has led to improvements being made in areas in which there had been concerns.

Students are well cared for. They are particularly appreciative of the steps taken to ensure that when they join in Year 7 they settle quickly. This includes their spending a week at the school in the term before they join. Good links with the local primary schools are established and information, such as identifying those who will require academic support, for example to develop literacy skills, is passed on and made good use of. Home visits are undertaken by staff when this is helpful and have helped some students who are nervous about school to overcome this. Students in Year 11 speak highly of the support they are given in making their educational choices for when they leave the school. Leadership and management are good and the school's leaders show a strong commitment to working with individual students to make sure that they prosper. This extends to the curriculum, which in addition to having a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects, has the flexibility to provide for individual talents: for example, the taking of an advanced mathematics course in Year 8, and GCSE examinations in language

in Years 8 and 9 for those who show exceptional talent. There is also, for those whose talents and interests require it, extended work experience higher up the school. The curriculum is further enhanced by a large number of wide ranging enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These are greatly appreciated by students and it contributes to their considerable enjoyment of school as well as their sociability and cultural development, which are outstanding. The school's concern to ensure that all students take advantage of all that is offered means that a very high proportion have taken part in a residential trip. The students who attend the school's hearing and language centre are well integrated, joining in the lunchtime clubs and having access to all GCSE subjects. Students develop a good range of skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being. Their literacy and numeracy development are good, they are proficient users of information and communication technologies and they work together well in groups. In addition, students contribute well to the community, for example through the active school council and visits to the elderly. Behaviour in lessons is good and students settle well to work. Around the school behaviour is also good though with some occasional boisterousness. Students report that there is some bullying but this is rare and is usually quickly and effectively dealt with.

The school is fully compliant with the requirements for the safeguarding of students. They are taught well about how to live healthy lifestyles, and they put this into excellent practice. For example a very high proportion take part in sporting activities. Their awareness of how to look after themselves in potentially perilous situations is also good, helped by the school's teaching and advice. A high proportion of the parents who sent inspectors their views on the school speak positively of it and its commitment to students' safety. They also agree that their child enjoys school.

Governors have a good knowledge of the school and support and challenge it well. The school's leaders evaluate the school thoroughly and realistically. The process of self-evaluation is now also undertaken by subject leaders and this leads to some good identification of areas for development. The school's capacity to improve is good. There is good detail in some self-evaluations, with good analysis of data to identify which areas of learning students are having difficulty with. However, detail of this sort is not universal. Detailed evaluations of teaching quality and a critical analysis of the curriculum is sometimes lacking. The improvement plans themselves are variable in quality, and do not have sufficient quantitative targets for improvement. This means that the school's governors, senior leaders and the subject leaders themselves are not able to regularly monitor the impact of improvements and to take further action if necessary.

The school's specialist status has a good effect on attainment. Standards have risen significantly since the specialisms were adopted. The curriculum has developed considerably and includes classes in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology for the local community.

Community cohesion is good. The school has a good understanding of the characteristics of the community it serves. High numbers from local villages attend classes at the school. The diversity of the local community is provided for, for example through courses for the unemployed and for young mothers. Outreach workers are employed, for instance to provide for the local Traveller community. The school is aware that the local population contains representatives from few different faith groups and so ensures that, through the school curriculum, there is study of the diverse groups that live in this country.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the self-evaluation undertaken by subject leaders is detailed and is used to devise improvement plans which have criteria which allow their impact to be monitored at regular intervals.
- Extend the good practice of using questions to assess understanding during lessons so that teaching approaches can be altered if necessary, and to ensure that students of all abilities are challenged.

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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 ¹ 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/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
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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 learners' needs?	2
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 eliminated	2
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
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**

8 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Cottenham Village College, Cottenham, CB24 8UA

Thank you for your help when we inspected your school. We spoke to a good number of you in meetings, lessons and around the school. We thought you were articulate, confident and helpful. We were impressed by how highly you spoke of your school. Your enjoyment of it is strong.

Your school is a good school and some of its features are outstanding. It makes great efforts to ensure that all of you are well-catered for. This shows, for example, in the curriculum which is well designed to cater for the range of your interests and abilities. The many extra-curricular activities offer a wide variety of pursuits. Your awareness of healthy lifestyles is excellent and you have a good knowledge of how to stay safe.

You learn well at school and make good progress. This is because you are taught well and your school's leaders use the data they have from your assessments to try to stop any underachievement. You also develop well personally. We were impressed by how well you get along, both with each other and with your teachers. You behave well and make a good contribution to the community.

We have suggested two ways in which your school should develop. First, that your school's subject leaders carry out detailed evaluations of the work of their faculties. For example, to check what teaching quality is like in some detail so that good practice can be shared, and to check which areas of their subjects you find most difficult so that changes to the teaching approach can be considered. We have suggested that their plans for improvement are written in such a way that it is easy to check that the improvements are working. The second area is to do with the use of questions in lesson. We are suggesting that questions are used more widely to check that you are understanding the work, so the teaching can be adapted if you are not.

Best wishes for your future,

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector