

City of Ely Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110883
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325249
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2008
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	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1258
Sixth form	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bill Harrison
Headteacher	Mr Richard Baker
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2005
School address	Downham Road Ely Cambridgeshire CB6 2SH
Telephone number	01353 667763
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school serves a large mainly rural area, the population of which is growing rapidly. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is slightly more than half the national average. The proportion who are from minority ethnic groups is less than half the national average, though it is increasing. Although there is a greater proportion than nationally of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, there is a smaller proportion who have statements of special educational needs. The school has a specialism in business and enterprise.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

City of Ely Community College is a satisfactory and improving school. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory, as is the school's capacity to improve. Standards at GCSE have risen steadily in the last three years and were average in 2008. These results are the highest in recent years and the school exceeded its targets. They represent satisfactory progress for students, whose standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are average. Progress is known to be improving because the school now has a good means of monitoring students' progress towards their targets and, as a result, is providing support where it is needed. In addition, students benefit from a good curriculum. It provides well for students' different abilities and interests, particularly for the 14 to 16 age group. Teaching is satisfactory, though some is outstanding. However, too much is pedestrian in pace and too much is overly dominated by the teacher talking. There are insufficient opportunities for students to engage in independent work. The school's own evaluation of teaching is too positive and the initiatives to bring about its improvement, while having a positive effect, are not yet making a big enough difference. The role of subject leaders in bringing about improvement, although increasing, is not sufficiently developed, nor was it at the time of the previous inspection, and the monitoring of their work by senior leaders is too infrequent.

There is a strong emphasis in the school on the personal development of students. This is improving, and is now good. Students' level of enjoyment is good. Their attendance is satisfactory and improving. A very good approach is being taken to ensure that students who are new to the school, including those who have moved to it from overseas, are made to feel welcome and helped to integrate. The school has developed useful means of helping those who are at an early stage in their acquisition of the English language. This helps them to understand the specialist vocabulary needed to learn in English lessons and mathematics. Students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds attend more frequently than students do overall. Students are cared for well. The progress and well-being of vulnerable students is carefully monitored.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, though a small number of parents expressed some concerns about it. Students' fitness and understanding of healthy lifestyles is satisfactory and the extensive range of extra-curricular sporting activities helps to ensure that many take a good amount of exercise. Students say they feel safe in school and the great majority of parents agree with this. Students make a good contribution to the community.

The school's specialist status has enriched the curriculum. For example, all students in Years 7 to 11 take a business course. Enterprise education is also well developed. Information and communication technology is strong in the school. The specialist subject targets have been either reached or exceeded. As a result, students are developing well the skills that will contribute most to their future economic well-being. The school has worked well with the community, for example introducing enterprise education to some primary schools, business studies to some secondary schools and running family learning days with parents.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards are below average at Advanced level where fewer students than average attain the higher grades of A to C. Nevertheless, they make satisfactory progress from their GCSE results,

which are lower than the average sixth former nationally. In 2007, some Year 13 students underachieved because they completed two subjects rather than their expected three or more. The school has reviewed its provision to address some weaknesses in its induction and guidance of students. This has helped to reverse the fall in standards. Currently, progress toward students' target grades is at least satisfactory and a much greater proportion now complete three or more A Level subjects.

Most students enjoy their time in the sixth form and contribute much to their own and the wider community. Student retention rates are satisfactory. An appropriate range of courses for the range of abilities is offered, including successful vocational qualifications that are currently being extended further. A satisfactory range of enrichment activities adds breadth to students' learning and progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The sixth form leader has a realistic understanding of the quality of current provision and has diagnosed what needs to be done to bring about improvement. The monitoring and improving of teaching quality, student progress and particularly attendance, need sharpening in order to accelerate the pace of change.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning so that standards rise.
- Develop the role of middle leaders in bringing about further improvement and provide them with more frequent monitoring and support.
- Improve the accuracy of self-evaluation, for example in the focus on learning in lesson observations.
- In the sixth form, ensure that attendance is accurately monitored each day.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at GCSE have risen steadily in the last three years and are now average. In 2007, too few students attained five or more GCSE grades C that included English and mathematics because of weaknesses in English achievement in particular. The proportion attaining A and A* grades across the school was also too low. Both weaknesses have been tackled and consequently, 45% of students attained five good GCSEs that include English and mathematics in 2008; a rise of 14 percentage points on the previous year. Current indications are that these higher standards are being maintained among Year 11 students currently and there are signs that progress is continuing to improve, albeit slowly. Achievement across subjects varies, with strengths in some, including science, and vocational areas such as leisure and tourism.

In Year 9, there is also a trend of improvement in standards. In 2008, the unconfirmed results were average, although the students involved were also higher attaining on entry to the school than the previous year. Overall, students' achievement from the time of their entry to school to the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. It has improved most significantly in English and the proportion attaining higher levels rose in 2008.

Students from minority ethnic groups did not do quite as well as others at GCSE in 2008, though they made satisfactory progress. However, gifted and talented students now make better progress than others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students feel safe, speak positively about the school and enjoy what it offers. They say that there are few incidents of bullying and they are confident that the school deals with such incidents promptly. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good, students cooperate with their teachers and show perseverance even when lessons are slow. The physical health of most students is good and they have a sound understanding of healthy lifestyles. However, too many who have school lunches are still not adopting healthier eating habits.

There are some good examples of students contributing to the school community, for example, Year 10 students volunteer to become class mentors for Year 7 and Year 12 students help in lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school is satisfactory overall and the lessons observed ranged from unsatisfactory to outstanding with the majority of lessons identified as satisfactory. The school's view of teaching is more favourable than that of the inspectors.

Typical lessons are well planned, although learning objectives are not sufficiently linked to the spread of ability in the class. Teachers exhibit good subject knowledge and a secure understanding of examination requirements. Lessons proceed at a satisfactory pace and with appropriate challenge but teacher talk dominates, with the result that students remain passive. In many lessons, questions are asked only of those volunteering to answer and so are not used well to assess students' understanding.

The outstanding lessons are carefully planned to take account of the spread of ability, identifying specific objectives for different groups in the class. The lessons are challenging and proceed at a fast pace, making very good use of resources including new technology. Students are engaged and motivated by the exposition which includes carefully considered explanation and modelling. The final parts of the lessons are used very well to check learning and identify areas for further work.

Students' work is assessed regularly but their knowledge of their individual learning targets and what they need to do to improve further is sometimes not clear.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. Statutory requirements are met and the curriculum is designed well to meet the full range of students' ambitions and capabilities. The curriculum is broad and balanced and responsive to local needs in offering skills required by local employers. The school has widened provision and it includes cross-curricular projects; a range of vocational courses, for example in construction and sport; the use of alternative accreditation such as 'Preparation for Working Life' and additional literacy and numeracy qualifications.

A range of visits and special events enrich the curriculum well. Conference days covering personal, social and health education as well as citizenship make good use of members of the

community including local religious groups, police and action groups. Study skills are well supported, particularly in Year 11. There is a good variety of extra-curricular activities providing for a wide range of interests. Gifted and talented students are supported through science and mathematics challenges as well as creative writing classes in English.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is an effective system for tracking students' progress and identifying those who are underachieving, as well as those who are doing well. This is contributing to improving standards and achievement. Mentoring in Year 11, for those who are underachieving, is having a particular impact on raising achievement. Parents and carers are regularly informed about their child's progress, through written reports and at meetings. The school prepares students thoroughly for their next stage in education or training.

The work of a range of professionals is well coordinated to provide effective support for vulnerable students, for example through their attendance at the school's Support Base and Study Centre. There is also good liaison between the school and outside agencies. Safeguarding procedures are now robust and the school ensures pupils' welfare and safety through careful attention to risk assessments and safety on site.

There is good support for students for whom English is an additional language. Interpreters and translation services are available for students and parents when needed, and the school imaginatively organises events for students from other cultures to share and celebrate their experiences, such as the recent shared lunch for students who have joined the school from overseas and their friends.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school's leaders have identified the need to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure that students' academic standards rise. These have improved in 2008, as have other key areas such as attendance.

An over emphasis during lesson observations on the actions of the teacher as opposed to its impact on the learning of students is leading to inaccuracies in the evaluation of teaching quality. In some subject departments, information from assessments has been used well to identify the areas which students find difficult, so that the teaching can be adjusted to compensate. In some department improvement plans, the emphasis on improving teaching and the methods used to bring it about are not given enough focus. Those leaders who evaluate the plans have not identified this as an issue. Subject leaders are each linked to a senior leader who oversees their work, as a useful means of supporting and challenging leaders, but the relative infrequency limits their effectiveness.

The governing body knows the school well and has high aspirations for its future. Such matters as examination performance are taken very seriously, and governors follow this up if there are areas of underperformance. However, they do not know enough about how well different groups in the school are faring and so are not in a position to evaluate fully the effectiveness of the school's work.

The development of community cohesion is good. It is a strength of the school. There are some good examples of students contributing to their school community by, for example, acting as mentors to younger students, and contributing to the local community on the youth council. Students have good opportunities to work with those who have joined the school from overseas and there are good links between the sixth form and a school in Romania. Students learn about the beliefs of different religious groups.

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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?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	4
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	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	3
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	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of City of Ely Community College, Ely, CB6 2SH

Thank you for your help when we inspected your school recently. We spoke to quite a number of you and you were very helpful.

We found that your school is satisfactory and improving. You are making better progress in your work and your behaviour has improved since the school was last inspected. Your school has a good way of checking on the progress you are making, and your teachers provide good help for those of you who need it in order to pass examinations. The curriculum is good, you are able to choose from a wide range of subjects and there are plenty of clubs for you to go to after school. You are cared for well in school too and you have good opportunities to contribute to the community. However, your attendance is only satisfactory and in the sixth form it is inadequate. We hope that those of you who do not attend regularly enough will start to do so and that you all make an effort to miss as little school as possible, including those of you who are in the sixth form.

We have made some suggestions for how your school can improve further so that your learning continues to improve. The suggestions are to do with the school's leaders looking at the ways in which you are taught and seeing if they can be improved so that you learn more. We also found that you do not get enough opportunity to develop your skills of independent learning during lessons and we would like the school to give you more opportunities for this.

Best wishes for your future

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector