

# Ullswater Community College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112393
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	325595
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 April 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Andrew Johnson 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>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1465
Sixth form	256
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Ian White
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Stewart Gimber
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 January 2006
<b>School address</b>	Wetheriggs Lane Penrith Cumbria CA11 8NG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01768 242160
<b>Fax number</b>	01768 242165

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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 April 2009
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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

Ullswater Community College is a larger than average comprehensive school serving one of the biggest catchment areas in England, including both rural and small urban populations. A large proportion of children travel to the college on buses and some travel a considerable distance. This is a non-selective college whose nearest neighbouring school is selective. The proportion of students who come from minority ethnic groups is very low, as is the percentage whose first language is not English, although this number has grown in recent years. The proportion eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds, although the majority do not live in areas of significant social deprivation. The college holds business and enterprise specialist status. The percentage of students with statements of special educational needs is above the national average because the college hosts a strategic facility, currently attended by 32 students who, in the main, have severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties. The proportion of students identified as having a learning difficulty and/or disability in the main college is around the national average. The college holds Healthy School's status and has been awarded the Sportsmark, Fair Trade Mark and the Inclusion Chartermark.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement in most subjects in Key Stage 4, and in the way in which the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of a significant proportion of students.

Most students enter the college with standards that are broadly in line with the national average. At the end of Year 11 most students leave college with overall standards that are below the national average. This represents inadequate achievement overall. Students make insufficient progress in Key Stage 4 and standards reached in most GCSE examinations are lower than they should be. Students of lower ability, in particular, do not achieve as well as they should do. This is because the curriculum, whilst meeting statutory requirements, does not meet the needs and aspirations of significant numbers of students. Specialist business and enterprise status has had a positive impact on the breadth of activities and experiences offered to students. Plans are in place to broaden the curriculum further next year.

Teaching and learning, while satisfactory overall, are of variable quality. Inspectors observed a range of lessons including many good and some outstanding examples. However, in the less successful lessons students at both ends of the ability scale do not always make the progress they should. Students' work examined during lessons showed that marking is not carried out consistently enough in all subjects. The college's observation of teaching and learning provides a broadly accurate basis to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The college recognises the importance of robust monitoring of the performance of students. It has recently put in place more effective systems to monitor student progress at a whole-college level and there are some good examples of departmental reviews leading to improvement. However, the good practice present in some subjects, such as mathematics, is not apparent in the management of all subjects or for all groups of students, as is evident from the inconsistent and sometimes slow rates of students' progress.

A collective determination exists across the college to bring about further improvement. This is being driven forward by the senior leadership team and is fully supported by governors. The leadership team has been strengthened significantly in the last two years. The financial position has been transformed in the last three years and provides a much firmer footing for improvement. Inspectors agree with many aspects of the college's self-evaluation, which identifies most of the key areas for improvement. Until this year, plans and actions put in place to accelerate progress and raise standards have not had sufficient impact. However, based on its recent track record, the college is now able to demonstrate the necessary capacity to improve.

Staff and students report that the ethos of the college is based upon a strong moral imperative to include and value everyone. Parents are very supportive of the college, although around a quarter of those who returned questionnaires thought that behaviour could improve. The college has worked hard to improve the behaviour of a minority of students. Inspectors observed students behaving in a sensible and mature way around the college and behaviour was generally good in lessons. Students reported that behaviour was usually good and bullying was rare. Students adopt good attitudes towards healthy lifestyles.

There is good pastoral care. Students develop positive attitudes about discrimination, equality and the need for good race relations. The support for students in the strategic facility is good. Students' personal development is enhanced by the opportunities they take up to work with younger or less academically able peers. The positive contribution that students make to both their immediate and the wider community is outstanding. Projects and charities are selected by the students and most involve the whole college community; this is a good example of the inclusive ethos of the college. The college provides popular adult education facilities to its local community.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

This is an effective sixth form where the quality of teaching is good. Students are well supported and make good progress. Students who spoke to inspectors were unanimous in their support for the inclusive character of the college and feels this prepares them well for their life beyond college. The business and enterprise status creates a strong work related focus. Students develop good independent learning skills. Numerous projects exist for students to develop their entrepreneurial skills and at the same time make a positive contribution to the life of the community.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Every opportunity is taken to make sure students engage in events that challenge and raise their aspirations. Typical examples are conferences to explore themes such as women in business and a mock trial in a magistrates' court. Visitors to college enrich their spiritual, moral and social development with events such as the "Red Ladder project" that deals with mental health issues. There is good support and guidance for students in their career choices and the vast majority of students, who wish to progress to higher education, do so.

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

- Tackle underachievement in Key Stage 4.
- Ensure a greater match between the curriculum and the needs and aspirations of a significant proportion of students in Key Stage 4.
- Share aspects of good management more widely across the college.
- Improve the consistency and quality of the marking of students' work.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

When students arrive in Year 7 the large majority have attained test results in core subjects that are around average, with a small but significant minority attaining the lowest scores. Only a few have reached the very highest levels of attainment. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE by the end of Year 11, although improving, has been below the national average for the last three years. When English and mathematics are included this proportion is closer to, but still below average. There has been an overall trend of improvement in pass rates at GCSE over the last three years; however, this varies significantly between subjects and in 2008 many subjects were still well below average. In the last three years, the gap between the overall pass rate at GCSE and the national average has been slowly closing.

Most students make satisfactory or better progress in the core subjects in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, overall progress is inadequate. In the last three years evidence shows that, across the

ability range, most groups of students do not achieve as well as they should. Although underachievement is apparent in many groups, it is particularly significant for lower ability boys and those who become disaffected with their education in Key Stage 4. The recent improvement in progress in mathematics is most impressive and in 2008 students made good progress and achieved results at GCSE that were above average. Students with profound or multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are based in the strategic facility make good progress in their personal development. The majority of students in the main college, identified as having barriers to learning, for example, those who lack motivation, do not progress as well as they should.

Students join the sixth form with a wide range of prior qualifications and experience, but those who enrol on GCE programmes have broadly average prior attainment. Pass rates at A and AS level are generally high, although the proportion of students gaining higher grades is around average. Progress made in the sixth form varies between subjects, although it is good overall. Success rates on vocational programmes vary but are generally well above the national average. There are good progression rates from the sixth form into higher and further education and employment.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The personal development of students is good. Most students feel safe and as a result of the efforts of the college, incidents of bullying and poor behaviour are rare and have reduced significantly. Students' views are listened to; for example, they said they would appreciate a 'buddying system' and one has been initiated. The vast majority of students and their parents are very supportive of the college and appreciate the improvements it is making.

Ullswater students understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and there are high levels of participation in lunchtime and after college sports activities. Students are particularly proud of the success of college teams and enjoy trips and tours abroad, including the recent visit to South Africa. Various performing arts projects also attract huge support.

This is an inclusive college, which has an extremely low exclusion rate and the small proportion of students who misbehave are effectively supported. Attendance levels are satisfactory, although the college recognises it must continue to improve the attendance of a small but significant number of students, who do not attend as often as they should, particularly in Key Stage 4. The college prepares most of its students well for their future economic well-being and this results in few students leaving the college without work or a further training option.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A very small proportion of lessons observed by inspectors were inadequate and many were good. Behaviour is generally good in lessons; students are usually attentive and keen to learn. In a few lessons, they are less well motivated by the work they are given. The best aspects of lessons include teachers' focused efforts to develop students' literacy skills as part and parcel of their work. Students often help one another and work effectively in groups. The needs of students of middle ability within a teaching group are often met well. However, in a significant number of lessons observed, tasks lacked sufficient breadth

to challenge the more able, or were pitched at too high a level for the less able. The college has set, as a priority, the improvement of opportunities for the gifted and talented in some lessons.

Whilst some students' books are well kept, showing that a pride is taken in college work, others in the same class can be untidy. In some books presentation is poor, handwriting careless and spelling and grammatical mistakes are common. In many cases, the marking of students' routine work is cursory; comments are infrequent and superficial. The quality assurance of the marking of routine work is inadequate in some departments. When students do particular pieces of work for assessment purposes, feedback is more helpful.

The quality of teaching and learning has been enhanced over the last year by more frequent and effective monitoring of lessons by heads of department and senior staff. Criteria for the evaluation of lessons are explicit and there is reasonable grading against these criteria. Notes from observations of lessons make pertinent points that are readily acted upon by teachers. The monitoring records show that the quality of teaching is improving. Appropriate guidance and development are provided to teachers on how to make lessons more effective.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 4**

Overall the curriculum does not adequately meet the needs of all groups of students. In spite of changes that are being made, there is insufficient scope to interest and challenge students, particularly those who fall just below the middle range of ability in Key Stage 4. Staff take painstaking care to arrange relevant courses for students who might otherwise not remain in education, although opportunities are limited locally. Young apprenticeships are an example of successful work in this area. Plans are in place to develop more appropriate courses and accreditation for students to gain the qualifications they need.

The college's specialist status in business and enterprise is used effectively to prepare some students for the next stage of their education or employment. The partnership with local employers and colleges offers work placements and training in interview skills and financial management. Work related activities are features of the best lessons. Vocational options often shape the choices students make about their careers, particularly in the field of childcare.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The vast majority of parents are right to be pleased with the level of care and support their children receive. One parent's comment is typical of many, stating, 'Whenever I have met with staff to discuss the progress of my children, they have always been supportive and encouraging and clearly care about their students' welfare'. Statutory requirements relating to safeguarding and child protection procedures are securely in place. The college continues to work on improving the attendance of a few students who are persistently absent. There are few incidents of racism or bullying and these are dealt with effectively.

Great care is taken to ensure that the individual needs of students are met as they make the transitions between schools and across key stages. Older students say they feel very well prepared to make informed decisions about career choices. Students have many opportunities to work together as teams and take on responsibilities. Sixth form students are given opportunities to train as 'peer-mentors'. They play an active and valuable part in supporting Year 7 students, taking on the role of 'buddies'. They also give up their free time to support

students who are learning English as an additional language and run a lunch time activities club each week for students in the strategic facility. Excellent links with outside agencies help to ensure that students' needs are met. Students with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well cared for and their needs are sensitively met.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher and senior leaders have successfully translated their vision of an inclusive college into action. Recently, well designed systems have been introduced to close the gap in achievement between Ullswater's students and the national average. For example, tracking systems were improved in 2008 and are now being used more effectively to measure students' progress. Targets are in place to enable teachers and middle leaders to recognise underachievement more quickly and analyse the reasons for it. Self-evaluation identifies the most urgent priorities for improvement. However, it does not link together key aspects of the college's provision to take into account the impact provision has on students' achievement.

Some aspects of departmental management are good and this has resulted in significant improvements to levels of progress made by students. However, the impact management has across the college is inconsistent. Plans set out some of the required changes necessary across most aspects of the college. The promotion of equality and diversity is successfully integrated into most aspects the college's work, however, some weaknesses in the curriculum means that not all students are able to reach their full potential.

There are strong partnerships in place and the college makes a particularly good contribution to the cohesion of the local community. Governors are supportive of the college and give of their time freely. They have improved their ability to hold the college to account and are clearly setting ambitious targets. The college, however, does not currently provide satisfactory value for money.





## 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?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	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	2

## Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	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	
The extent to which 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	3	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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?	Yes	

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

3 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ullswater Community College, Cumbria, CA11 8NG

Thank you for welcoming inspectors to your college and for your contributions to the inspection. We enjoyed talking with you, hearing your views and reading those of your parents and carers. We found many of you to be well motivated in your studies and to be developing good personal and social skills. Your teachers and the college leaders have your best interests at heart and are working hard to help you achieve better results and create a good environment for learning. We were impressed by the way you adopt healthy lifestyles, how you develop in confidence and the way you treat everyone equally in the college and wider community. Most of you value the college and behave well and responsibly. The sixth form is a good one and as a result students make good progress and many go on to higher education, employment or training.

We found that while your college does many things well, there are some important areas where there are weaknesses and we have given the college a notice to improve these aspects.

Given your starting points, many of you do not achieve as well as you could in Key Stage 4. There are a number of reasons for this, including some gaps in the curriculum which does not always match your aspirations or needs. We have asked the college to make the following improvements:

- tackle underachievement in Key Stage 4
- improve the curriculum, to give all students a chance of gaining the level of academic qualification of which they are capable
- ensure greater consistency in marking to show you how to improve your work
- share aspects of good management more widely across the college.

You can do your part by ensuring that you continue to try hard in lessons, behave well and continue to attend on a frequent basis.

Best wishes

Andrew Johnson HMI