

Ivybridge Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113541
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325842
Inspection date	7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	2242
Sixth form	425
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Treve Mitchell
Headteacher	Geoffrey Rees
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2006
School address	Harford Road Ivybridge PL21 0JA
Telephone number	01752 691000
Fax number	01752 691247

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following:

- whether standards and achievement in English and mathematics are better this year and if so, whether improvement is sustainable
- the progress and achievement of more able students.

Inspectors gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, students and a governor. A range of college documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing students in lessons and elsewhere. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection. Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the college's own self-evaluation assessments are not justified, and these have been included in this report where appropriate.

Description of the school

This is one of the largest single-site secondary schools in the country and has a very large sixth form. Students come from an extensive geographical area which includes very mixed urban and rural communities. It is a High Performing Specialist College, covering three specialist areas in sport, science and languages. It holds several other designations, such as accreditation as a Training college, as an International Baccalaureate World school and is a Leading Edge school. Its wide range of national awards includes Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold and International and Healthy schools awards. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and almost all use English as their mother tongue. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average and the highest percentage of these have either behavioural, emotional and social needs or specific learning difficulty. The Principal is to retire shortly after a lengthy period of service in the college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This college is outstanding in all aspects of its work. Exceptional leadership and management have sustained this position through its previous inspections and have moved the college on yet further since its excellent last report. Aspects of exemplary provision, including management, are rightly recognised as models of outstanding practice nationally. Incisive self-evaluation results in accurate analysis and highly effective planning for improvement. This is a place where students are happy and where every success is celebrated and valued. Students and staff are rightly proud of academic and personal achievements across an impressive range of activities. The three specialisms, particularly the original one in sport, are deeply embedded, creating very positive impact across the college. Sports incentives, for instance, have significantly improved the behaviour and attendance of a minority of students identified in the last report, and both these aspects are now outstanding.

Parents who responded to the questionnaire accurately pinpoint the college's many strengths, commenting, for instance, on a 'fantastic school' where 'staff and leaders strive for excellence in every way'. They recognise the Principal as an 'inspirational headmaster who will be missed', as the college moves into a new phase of its development. One root of its enormous success lies in his deep commitment to maximising the potential of all individuals in the college, adults and students alike. This has become a guiding principle for all staff, ensuring excellent succession planning which provides the college with outstanding capacity to improve further. Staff are exceptionally skilled at promoting excellent achievement for all students and senior staff ensure that personnel receive every opportunity to extend their skills in all aspects of educational and personal development. Another outstanding feature, much appreciated by parents, is the enthusiastic commitment of all staff to developing students' experience and success in every possible way through an exceptionally rich curriculum and extra-curricular activity well beyond the classroom.

When students enter the college, standards are somewhat above average and by Year 11, attainment and achievement are outstanding. An excellent track record of progress to Year 11 means that students move on with high standards across the range of subjects. The college recognised that achievement in English and mathematics had fallen recently because of unusual staffing difficulties in both departments. These have been rectified and provision is now strong and sustainable, so standards and achievement are improving. Students are on track to achieve significantly higher standards this year, bringing these subjects in line with the excellent achievement in other areas. Exemplary use of tracking systems introduced in recent years has given staff a much clearer picture of students' progress. When required, outstanding systems for intervention, guidance and support almost always avert any potential under-achievement. These procedures likewise ensure that students with learning difficulties or disabilities receive the excellent support which has created a consistent record of excellent achievement for these groups. These systems enable staff to target, challenge and stretch more able students, whose achievement is improving well across all subjects, including English and mathematics. For gifted and talented students, a strong culture in the college of identifying, fostering and celebrating strengths in areas such as art, sport and music leads to many outstanding achievements. Students' personal development is excellent. Outstandingly effective arrangements for transfer from their many primary schools mean that they know the college well before they arrive. They settle quickly and conform rapidly to high expectations of doing their best and behaving well. Sensitive internal organisation of groups in this extremely large college give it a 'big-made-small'

feel, so students soon know many others in their quarter-year group, for instance. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is excellent, so they become well-rounded, courteous young people, concerned for others' well-being and keen to contribute to the vibrant, dynamic life of the college and its community. Students show highly developed social skills in areas such as teamwork and cooperation, tempered with a healthy degree of competitiveness. These and other excellent personal attributes, including good key skills in English, mathematics and ICT, prepare them well for their future education and working life, with a strong understanding of how to keep safe, healthy and fit.

Another key factor in its success lies in the outstanding relationships between all the people in the college. This is a significant feature of the excellent teaching and learning which creates high levels of achievement. Staff describe this as the 'we' factor, where students, staff, parents and other partners all work together highly effectively towards continuous improvement, forming an exceptionally cohesive and unified community. The culture of staff extending and developing their own professional skills, through academic research for instance, appears 'infectious'. As students get older, therefore, they develop similar skills to a high level, challenging themselves towards even higher targets, for example.

The Principal's exceptional ability to drive this college forward is widely recognised and is utilised in an impressive range of ways at local and national level to promote improvements elsewhere. Many other staff contribute similarly effectively to improving other institutions and sharing expertise. Excellent staff development leads to 'refreshment' at all levels as people are promoted internally, or move into leadership in other schools. The excellent senior team is supported and challenged exceptionally well by governors who have powerful insight into the college's work. The international dimension is particularly strong, contributing to the college's outstanding contribution to community cohesion at all levels. An exceptional range of partnerships and links at home and abroad are used very effectively to enhance students' experience. A group of Thai students and staff visiting during the inspection, for instance, were extremely well integrated into college and local community life. Staff regard all students as individuals, nurturing and challenging them excellently well academically and personally, while making sure all develop a strong degree of independence. There were no key issues following the last report, but the college took extremely seriously the two minor issues identified and has made excellent improvement in areas related to teaching and student motivation.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

All the outstanding characteristics described in the main school apply to students in the sixth form, known as 'Tertiary' here. Students themselves rightly judge provision to be outstanding, with very few reservations about their progress, personal development or the quality of their learning. Standards are high and achievement outstanding, judgements which are validated by a number of external bodies. Students enjoy a very wide range of AS/A2 level options and an increased number of BTEC courses. Plans to extend this offer to include the International Baccalaureate and National Diplomas are well advanced. Students value in particular the exceptional relationships they share with staff, which are key to their excellently well developed sense of independence and resourcefulness. Although most would welcome more social space for post-16 activity, they are wise enough to realise that the college provides what it reasonably can. Sixth formers have a high profile in the college, are very involved with the main school and provide excellent role models for younger students. Retention on courses is high and if

students move elsewhere after Year 12, it is into the workplace, or to follow other courses unavailable here.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that improvements in standards and achievement already evident in English and mathematics are sustained.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	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	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	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**

■ 20 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ivybridge Community College, Ivybridge PL21 0JA

It was a real pleasure to be in your college when we came for the inspection and I am sorry we did not have more time to see more of what you do. I am writing to thank you for your welcome, particularly those whose lessons we visited and who talked to us, and to tell you all what we found out.

Yours is an outstanding school which is exceptional in all its work. It has been judged so in all its previous inspections and has improved even more since its last one. Because this is such a large school and we had only one day there, we had to focus our inspection on to very limited areas which we agreed in advance with the school. We looked in particular at whether you are now progressing better in English and mathematics, where achievement has not been as good as in other subjects recently. We found that progress has improved in both subjects because the measures the school has taken to improve staffing have resulted in better teaching and positive changes to the curriculum. Standards are on track to be much better this year. We looked at whether more able students are doing as well as others and we found that the progress of these students has improved well, partly because the detailed tracking records which staff now keep about your achievement enables them to identify these needs and provide more challenging work.

Our general judgements confirm the school's own evaluation of itself as an excellent school. Your standards are high and your achievements are outstanding in academic work and in a vast range of other ways. Your personal development is outstanding. This is because of exceptionally strong leadership and management of the school, and because the teaching you receive across an excellent curriculum is excellent. The care, guidance and support which staff provide are equally exceptional and many of you confirmed the very valuable individual help you get from teachers, tutors and many others. We were pleased to hear that the overwhelming majority of your parents agree with these judgements too.

Even when a school is as exceptional as yours, they and we recognise that there are still things to do to improve and the school knows exactly what these are. We have agreed with staff that the main priority is:

- to make sure that the improving standards and achievement in English and mathematics are sustained.

Thank you again.

Yours faithfully

Janet Simms

Lead inspector