

Freman College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117540
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326641
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Jennifer Brown 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	797
Sixth form	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Martin
Headteacher	Ms H Loughran
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
School address	Bowling Green Lane Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9BT
Telephone number	01763 271818
Fax number	01763 273467

Age group	13–18
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Inspection number	326641

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

Freman College is a smaller than average community college, situated in the small rural town of Buntingford. It has had specialist status for humanities, encompassing geography, English and citizenship, jointly with its two feeder middle schools since September 2005. The percentage of students who are eligible for free school meals is well below average, as also are the proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and those at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students registered as having learning difficulties is below average. A small number of looked-after children attend the college. Standards on entry to school are slightly above average.

Since September 2005 the college has coordinated a Sports Partnership, working with first, primary and middle schools in the Buntingford and Royston area. In November 2007 it became the hub school of an Extended Schools consortium.

The college has received the following national accreditations: Artsmark silver award, the Healthy Schools award and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Freman College is a good and improving college. It has some outstanding features and is held in high regard by parents and students. Their views are summed up by one parent who said: 'Freman College seems to allow their students to shine, focusing on their strengths and individuality. A lovely place to be educated.'

Standards and achievement are good. The strong focus placed by senior and middle managers on raising the quality of student achievement through improving teaching, the robust tracking and monitoring of students' progress and the spread of good practice, has resulted in the consistent improvement of standards since the last inspection. Standards at age 16 were the highest ever in 2008 and information provided by the college indicates they will be even better in 2009. Students make good progress during their time in the main part of the college and, for the significant number who continue their education in the sixth form, achievement and standards are outstanding.

Students' outstanding personal development and well-being are apparent and parents are virtually unanimous in their support for the way it promotes these qualities in their sons and daughters. Students of all ages make excellent contributions to the college and wider community through mentoring, voluntary work and fund-raising for charities. Students feel very safe at the college and bullying rarely occurs. Attendance has improved and is well above average. Exclusions have fallen significantly since the last inspection and are very low. The care and support students receive is outstanding and academic guidance is good.

Teaching and learning are good. Staff are highly committed and a warm, stimulating environment for learning is evident in most classrooms. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are effective at guiding and preparing students for the requirements of examinations. Effective use is made of questioning to challenge and deepen students' understanding. The quality of marking and assessment is good overall, but variable. Teachers do not always give clear guidance to students as to how they can improve their work and move on to the next level of learning.

The curriculum has improved and is now good. It is broader in Years 10 and 11 than at the time of the last inspection because of the college's specialist status and the introduction of a range of vocational courses. Statutory requirements are now met in religious education and students are prepared very well for their future economic well-being.

Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in standards, the care and support for students and their well-being and the curriculum, demonstrating that managers have good capacity to bring about further improvements. The evaluation of college performance is regular and coherent. The self-evaluation process has recently been refined to sharpen both the analysis of the impact of actions taken and also the identification of further areas for improvement at departmental level.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards at GCE, AS and A levels, are well above average. A high proportion of students who enter the college sixth form continue their studies for two years and make very good progress, relative to their starting points. The small number of students who study vocational subjects also achieve well. Attendance in the sixth form is excellent.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They are confident, highly articulate and supportive of one another. Students speak very enthusiastically about the college, in particular about the vertical tutor groups. The house system, peer mentoring, provision for personal, social and health education and the extensive responsibilities undertaken by students, all prepare them very well for higher education and the workplace.

The curriculum in the sixth form is good: a broad range of subjects is offered and meets students' needs very well. Retention rates are good and very high numbers of students go on to university.

Effective assessment systems and procedures for target-setting contribute well to students' achievement. The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes excellent, for example, in a Year 13 English lesson where students were assessing the reaction of different poets to the First World War in a sensitive and mature fashion. A striking feature of lessons is the excellent quality of relationships. Students feel very strongly that their tutors and teachers are very supportive, know them well and work hard to provide for their needs. They are guided very well and their academic progress is regularly reviewed.

Leadership and management are effective: the director of the sixth form and the assistant director have a clear vision and commitment to continuous improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers, when assessing students' work, consistently give clear guidance on how they can improve it further.
- Embed the recently refined self-evaluation system into regular practice, so that robust analysis of the impact of actions to bring about improvements informs further developments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at age 16 are above average. They have consistently improved since the last inspection as the result of the use of more challenging targets, closer tracking and monitoring of student progress and more closely focused observations of teaching and learning. The proportion of students achieving five or more higher grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has improved at a faster rate than average and the college has been largely successful in reducing the difference in performance between subjects. Statutory and specialist subject targets have been met or exceeded for the last two years and college data suggest this will continue in 2009. Inspectors confirmed the college's evaluation that students make good progress in most lessons. In 2008 student progress was not as good as in the previous year. Although standards and achievement in English and mathematics were very good, they were lower than expected in science. Information provided by the college indicates that actions to rectify this situation have been successful.

Standards at age 14 are consistently high and students make good progress in relation to their starting points. Actions to address the underachievement of boys have been successful. Students with learning difficulties also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is reflected in the consideration they show each other. Relations between them and with adults in the college

are excellent. This is particularly helped by the well-established vertical tutor-group system where students within each house, but of different year groups, meet daily for registration. They also help each other in their learning and general well-being. Such positive attitudes also result in outstanding behaviour and attendance that is well above average. Bullying is rare occurrence, which is well dealt with when necessary and students know who to go to for help. They feel safe, valued and enjoy their time in college. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy eating and exercise. This is helped by the extensive range of extra activities and sporting events they attend in large numbers after college, as well as their considerable involvement in programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Students are obviously proud to be part of the college and take on responsibility enthusiastically, acting as buddies, prefects and mentors to younger students in the college and feeder middle schools. The elected house and college councils play an active part in shaping college life and have been responsible for improvements in facilities. Their good progress in English, mathematics and information and communication technology, together with the extent to which they learn to think independently through the very good citizenship programme, provide students with an excellent preparation for future study and adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The college rightly judges that teaching and learning are good. Most of the lessons observed during the inspection were good or better and none were unsatisfactory.

Students' approach to learning is consistently very good: they are enthusiastic, attentive and articulate. Behaviour is excellent, so that lessons take place in a calm and orderly atmosphere and are characterised by very constructive relationships between teachers and students. Very occasionally, where the pace of lessons slackens, a few students become disengaged and chatty.

Teachers plan lessons in detail and use computers very well to support learning. They demonstrate good subject knowledge, good questioning skills, appropriate expectations and clear learning objectives so that students make good progress. However, work in lessons is not always clearly tailored to match the needs of different groups of pupils.

The quality of marking and assessment is good overall. There is some variation across the school but much work has been done to improve assessment systems. Where they are most effective, they are used well to inform teachers' planning and students are supplied with clear guidance on how to improve. However, teachers do not always give clear guidance on how students can move on to the next level of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and enrichment activities are outstanding. Students can choose from a broad range of mainly academic subjects and an increasing number of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. The organisation of the timetable enables virtually all to study their preferred combination of subjects. The college goes to considerable lengths to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of individual students and a very high proportion progress into post-16 education and training. Students particularly value work experience and days which focus on helping them to develop skills such as interview techniques and raise their awareness of the

range of available career opportunities. They also appreciate the extensive range of extra-curricular activities offered to them through sport, creative arts and educational and residential visits; consequently participation in them is very high.

Specialist status has enabled the college to improve its citizenship provision, the quality of teaching, information and communication technology resources and its links with feeder first and middle schools. Effective co-ordination of citizenship ensures that statutory requirements are fully met and that all subjects support the development of students' citizenship skills in a planned and coherent way. International visits and cross curricular themes, such as the Holocaust, help to broaden students' understanding of different communities and to develop their citizenship skills. Teachers and students from the college and its partner middle-schools visit each other and share teaching in the second half of the summer term and in the autumn term, thus aiding the transition of students from one school to another.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students' excellent personal development and well being are very much due to the outstanding care, guidance and support that the college provides. As part of its extended schools status the college works extremely well with families, the local community and professional agencies. It acts as the hub for the consortium of local schools and ensures that there is a trouble-free transition between the different stages of education. All child protection, safeguarding and risk assessment requirements are in place.

The needs of all students are identified early and arrangements put in place to support them, especially those with learning difficulties. The outstanding work of teaching assistants and support staff is especially effective in this area. The curriculum and organisation of the college have been adjusted to cater for those students with specific disabilities, helping them to make good progress, in line with their fellow students. Academic guidance is good, with the achievement of all students carefully tracked and individual targets in place that help students reach their potential.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, provides thoughtful, and insightful leadership for the college. The strong focus on raising standards and achievement, the well-being of students and ensuring the curriculum meets all their needs has brought about improvements in all these areas since the last inspection. Systems for tracking student achievement at individual, class, subject and college level are well embedded. Target setting is realistic, but challenging and whole college targets are consistently met or exceeded. There are effective processes for sharing good practice, both within and between departments, which are supported by a comprehensive professional development programme. Self-evaluation provides an accurate picture of the college. The self-evaluation process for middle managers has recently been refined to effect sharper analysis of areas for improvement at departmental level. Senior managers are aware of the need to be more specific in identifying the impact of actions to bring about improvement.

The college's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding, supported by its role as a specialist college and as a hub school. It recognises its position as part of a rural community

and engaged extensively with local, regional and international partners to widen the understanding of its students. As a result, students have a very good appreciation of the diversity of the modern world and are involved in numerous visits, exchanges and projects across many countries.

Effective use is made of resources to support college improvement and the college provides good value for money. Governors exercise their role well and have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	----------------	-------

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	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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?	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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	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 Freman College, Buntingford, SG9 9BT

You may remember that I recently visited the college with three other inspectors. I am writing to tell you the outcomes of this inspection. Thank you for making us so welcome during our visit, for the courtesy you showed us and the ways in which you shared your views with us, formally, informally and in lessons.

You are very good ambassadors for your college, of which you are clearly very proud. You like the vertical tutoring system, because it contributes so much to the friendly atmosphere and positive relationships that exist at the college. You told us you feel very safe at the college and think you are well looked after by the staff and by fellow students. You value the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, both sports and arts related, and the opportunity to take part in so many different educational visits.

Your college provides you with a good standard of education and some aspects of its provision are outstanding. Ms Loughran is a thoughtful and insightful headteacher and she and her staff have worked hard to bring about many improvements since the last inspection. It was very pleasing to see that standards, both at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form, are so good. Your excellent personal development and well-being are very much due to the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by college staff. The college's specialist status has helped to improve the curriculum, which is now good. The quality of teaching and your learning are good. Behaviour is outstanding so that lessons take place in a calm and orderly atmosphere but, very occasionally, a few students become disengaged and chatty.

To make your college even better we have recommended that:

- teachers consistently give you clear guidance, when assessing your work, on how you can improve it further
- managers at the college evaluate thoroughly the success of actions they have taken to bring about improvements.

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and to wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jennifer Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector