

Vale of Catmose College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120290
Local Authority	Rutland
Inspection number	327248
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	804
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	37
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Mike Petterson
Headteacher	Mr Stuart Williams
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cold Overton Road Oakham Rutland LE15 6NU
Telephone number	01572 722286
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Age group	11–16
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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 Vale of Catmose College is smaller than average. The proportions of students entitled to free school meals, from minority ethnic backgrounds or with English as an additional language are well below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. More students have statements of special educational needs than average and the college has specialist provision for 15 students. The college has had specialist visual arts status since 2002 and has established an art gallery and theatre as part of its facilities. It has been a central school for Rutland's extended services since 2004. The management of the school offers full day care for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The college also provides educational and recreational opportunities for adult learners.

The previous principal retired in the summer term. His replacement has been in post since the start of the autumn term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, with significant strengths in the way it supports the excellent personal development and well-being of the students. The EYFS provision is outstanding. The specialist status in the visual arts is evident from the minute you enter the grounds with cheerful murals produced by students, presided over by George the giraffe, a stunning sculpture by a professional artist. The impact of the specialism is one of the major strengths of the college and a major contributor to the excellent spiritual, social and cultural development of the students. The new principal and the senior leadership team have developed clearer systems to monitor the work of the college. As a result, their self-evaluation is accurate and they are tackling areas for improvement with increasing success. Parents are positive about the college and their views are reflected in a response from one of the questionnaires: 'This is a school I would be happy to recommend to any parent.'

Achievement is good. Standards in both key stages are above average. The levels that students have reached when they enter the college are average and by the time they reach Year 11 they have made good progress, so that their results in GCSE examinations are above average. In 2008, the percentage of students who gained five or more passes at grade C or above when English and mathematics are included was higher than the national average at 58%, as was the percentage gaining the top two grades.

There is a good curriculum, which is broad and balanced, supplemented by an outstanding number of additional activities covering sporting, artistic and musical opportunities. Every effort is made to ensure that each student in Key Stage 4 has a course of study that is suitable for his or her individual needs. There are many vocational and academic courses and a group of students have this term started to study for one of the new diplomas in creative arts.

The college provides an excellent level of care and support, which results in outstanding personal development. The guidance that students receive on their progress and what they need to do to improve is very good in the final two years in the college, but the relatively new systems introduced this year are not yet fully established across the school. Students demonstrate excellent attitudes and enjoy college a good deal as shown by their excellent attendance. Their behaviour is good and they are considerate to others. Their spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding. They support each other extremely well and feel safe. Those students who need individual support are extremely well cared for and make the same good progress as others.

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers generally plan activities that challenge the students. Many make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their lessons. In some lesson plans, too much emphasis is placed on what the students will do rather than what they will learn which results in activities that restrict opportunities for all students to be actively involved in the lessons. Most teachers use assessment information to ensure all students have work that is well matched to their ability and effectively and regularly check the progress being made in each lesson. Where this is not the case, this results in a drop in the pace of learning for some students, especially those who are more able.

The new principal is providing outstanding leadership. Staff, students and parents have all commented on noticeable improvements in attitudes and behaviour. There is a committed and enthusiastic senior management team, and strategic planning is of high quality. The middle leaders are better placed under the new management structure to monitor the work in their

subjects, but these systems are still being developed. Following a dip in GCSE results in 2006 and 2007, effective action was taken which resulted in a sharp rise in standards in 2008. Improvements since the last inspection in the personal development and well-being of the students show that the college is well placed to continue its development.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are close to those expected for their age. They make good and sometimes outstanding progress, because adults have excellent links with parents and an extremely good understanding of each child's background and needs. By the end of the pre-school phase, children attain above expected levels particularly in their personal and social skills. Parents are kept fully informed of their child's welfare and progress. One said that the Nursery is 'fantastic' and 'welcoming'. Assistants assess the attainment of children regularly and keep very detailed developmental records. They use the new national guidance for the Early Years curriculum very effectively in planning activities for each child's stage of development. Teaching is good. Assistants use very good questioning skills and model good speech to help children to improve their own communication skills. There is an effective balance of adult-led activities and those that are chosen by the children. There is an exceptionally high commitment to welfare and safety. However, very occasionally, assistants supervise activities too closely so that children do not have maximum opportunities to improve their independence. The outdoor area is used often and effectively, despite no direct access from classrooms. Leadership and management are excellent. The Nursery leader works outstandingly well with other team members to develop and improve the setting.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers consistently plan their lessons by focusing sharply on learning and assessing regularly the progress that individual students are making.
- Fully establish across all years the systems for guiding students on how to improve their work.
- Embed the new management structures to ensure increased rigour in the way subject leaders monitor and evaluate the work in their areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in Key Stage 3. By the end of Year 9, their standards are above average in all core subjects. The rate of progress in Key Stage 4 is also good. The unvalidated results for the GCSE examinations in 2008 were the best ever for the college. In the specialist subjects, performance was outstanding with 84% of students achieving a grade C or above and one quarter of students gaining the highest two grades. This is particularly commendable considering the high numbers entered for these subjects. The college generally meets its statutory targets and school leaders are increasing the challenge in future targets. Overall achievement is good.

Boys and girls perform equally well as do those students who need additional help with their learning. This is because the college takes great care to ensure that the curriculum is closely matched to each student's individual needs. The college collects data on student progress and carefully analyses this to enable swift personalised action to be taken when a student is falling behind. The progress seen in lessons is generally good, because the students are keen to succeed

and behave well. Some parents expressed concern about disruptions in lessons by a minority, but the inspection found no evidence of this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students show exceptional personal qualities. They benefit enormously from the Gallery, where they are encouraged to reflect on artistic works from a wide range of cultural and religious sources. They show an outstanding ability to empathise with others and to express their feelings and views. The sports and dance leaders programme, which a large number of students follow, ensures that they grow in confidence and maturity. Sports leaders run school clubs and competitions and work with a large number of local primary pupils as well as their peers. The regular music and drama productions are much valued by the local community and abroad, for example on a recent trip to Holland and Belgium. Students are polite and show great respect for others. Incidents of bullying or other forms of harassment are extremely rare. Attendance is excellent, being well above the national average for secondary schools. Students have an excellent understanding of the factors contributing to healthy living and a good understanding of how to stay safe. There is very significant take up of the very wide range of sporting and other activities provided at lunchtime and after school. The school council has been influential in bringing about many improvements. Students represent the college on other bodies in the wider local community and Year 9 students work as mentors for pupils in Year 6 at local primary schools in order to ease their transition to the secondary phase.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons are good and take place in a calm and well-ordered environment. Teachers know their students very well and are able to provide good individual attention. Students generally show positive attitudes to learning that contribute to their progress even in less stimulating lessons. In the most successful lessons, teachers capitalise on the good relationships to build opportunities for co-operative work and independent learning. These lessons are well structured and carefully planned. They allow students to steadily build their knowledge and skills and to see the links in their learning. The less successful lessons do not have sufficiently clear objectives and are planned only as a series of activities. Similarly, in many of the better lessons students are fully aware of their targets and of the levels at which they are working. The lesson plans reflect this. In the more successful lessons, teachers use skilful questioning to ensure student involvement, to extend their thinking and to assess the progress of individuals and groups. Many teachers use marking as a way of providing specific feedback to students regarding how to improve their work, but much marking, although regular, is limited in its scope.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum promotes good achievement and serves the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of students. The specialist subjects make a significant and positive contribution to the curriculum. There is very effective collaboration with other institutions to extend the opportunities and the range of subjects in Years 10 and 11, which are extensive. The quality of the programmes is well monitored, with efficient communication and shared information.

Initiatives such as the Engage programme are having a positive effect on the attitudes and attendance of targeted groups of students. Students who need extra help with their learning are provided with individual packages of support. The college supports the development of the students' basic skills, and links with local business develop their understanding of the world of work. There are opportunities for work experience and for students to apply their skills in enterprise, for example by gaining funding for college projects from successful sponsorship bids. This prepares them well for their future working lives. The college recognises that the curriculum in Key Stage 3 could be improved further in order to prepare the students more fully for the demands of Key Stage 4 and beyond. Secure plans are in place to address this issue.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is an extremely high level of commitment by the staff to this aspect of the college provision. This is evident during lessons, lunchtimes, after school and in school holidays. The care and support that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive is outstanding, from early identification to the help they get for transition from the college at the end of Year 11. A wide range of personalised support programmes is put in place and these are rigorously monitored on a daily basis. Parents are kept well informed and students contribute to the evaluation and planning of their programmes. An effective information system enables all staff to gain easy access to individual plans. Consequently, these students make good personal progress and enjoy coming to college. More challenging targets are being set, but students are not universally aware of them or of their current levels of working. Arrangements for safeguarding comply with requirements and there are good procedures for monitoring health and safety, for example in the preparation for school trips. There are excellent working relationships with other agencies and students get good support to make their choices on leaving the college.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders share a clear vision and direction for the college, which has been communicated and shared effectively with others. There is a common drive to raise standards and to place the college in the top 10% of schools nationally. The governing body share this vision, are supportive and knowledgeable and have started to provide a greater degree of challenge to the college leaders. The college's excellent links with the community and other educational institutions, especially through the specialist status as an arts college, contribute significantly to learning. The college is well managed and runs smoothly. Roles and responsibilities are clear. The recent restructuring of management has increased the capacity of all levels of leadership to perform their function in monitoring and evaluating the work in their areas more effectively, although they are not yet fully embedded. Data on students' progress are now being used more effectively to evaluate the college's performance and plan for improvements.

The college is truly inclusive and no groups of learners are badly served or achieve less well than others. Gifted and talented students have suitable opportunities to develop their abilities and those students who need additional help are exceptionally well served. The college contributes well to community cohesion through the many artistic, musical and sporting opportunities it provides. Students have some opportunities to extend their understanding of

global communities and those where there is a greater mix of ethnic cultures. Outstanding benefits for all aspects of the college provision come through the specialist status. In particular, the Gallery is used exceptionally well by both the college and the local community. It greatly enhances the students' personal development and provides inspiration for the work being undertaken in other curriculum areas.

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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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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?	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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
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	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?	2
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	1
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**

21 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of the Vale of Catmose College, Oakham, LE15 6NU

On behalf of myself and the other inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you for the way you contributed to the inspection.

We found that the college is good with some particular strengths. One of these is the way it supports you to become such confident and well-behaved young people, with very positive attitudes and an outstanding ability to reflect on a wide range of issues. The Gallery helps and inspires you in this. The many musical and sporting activities in which so many of you take part build your confidence. You make an outstanding contribution to the life of the college and to other schools through your work as junior sports leaders. You achieve well in your studies and those of you who need additional help are well supported with individual plans.

Teachers work hard and the quality of the lessons and your learning in them are good. The range of subjects you can study is wide and offers many different options. This means you make good progress and achieve well. You told us how much you appreciate the improvements that have been made recently. The leadership of the school is good and the changes that have been made to the management structure will help the college to further improve.

We have asked the college to do the following.

- Make sure teachers consider very carefully what they want each of you to learn when they plan their lessons and check regularly how well each of you is progressing as the lesson proceeds.
- Offer guidance to all year groups on how well you are progressing and what you need to do to improve. You can help by making sure you know what your targets are and how well you are progressing towards them.
- Develop the new systems for subject leaders so they can be even more effective in monitoring the quality of the work in their departments.

To those of you who gave up your time to talk to us, may I thank you. I encourage all students to read my full report, which contains more details.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector