

Witchford Village College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110871
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337593
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2010
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	799
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Berezynskyj
Headteacher	Mr David Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	3 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 41 lessons and saw 41 teachers, spending a total of 20.5 hours observing learning. They held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the college's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the minutes of governing body meetings. They scrutinised the students' work, the college records and all of the 214 responses to the student, parental and staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- safeguarding
- learning and teaching
- standards and achievement
- the care, guidance and support provided.

Information about the school

The college is smaller than average and draws pupils from a wide range of rural villages near the City of Ely. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is a third of the national figure and the proportion of those whose first language is not English is low. The proportion of girls and boys in different year groups varies significantly.

The proportion of students registered by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is above the national figure. The local authority supports a special unit on site (The Cabin) for students with Aspergers Syndrome and other complex learning needs. There are a small number of looked after children in the school.

The school has been granted sports college specialist status and has received the following national accreditations: Investors in People, Artsmark Silver, Sportsmark, the Football Association Charter Standard, the Sports Coordinators Award, the Badminton England Premier School Award and the British Council International School Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school that has made considerable progress in the last two years. Outcomes for individuals and groups are good and show a rising trend. Standards have improved in the last two years and overall students are currently making good progress although results in English are significantly stronger than in mathematics. Standards in mathematics have been below average for some years but are now satisfactory; similarly, the proportion of students making the expected progress has improved significantly. Equality of opportunity is good; the small numbers of students from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds do as well or better than their peers; the college has successfully reached out to the traveller community. Those students who find learning difficult make good progress and those who receive specialist support from the staff in 'The Cabin' do particularly well.

Overall, teaching is good; there are no significant inadequacies in particular subjects or across year groups. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching are good and this is a real strength of the work of senior staff. The improvements secured in teaching in the last two years have helped raise standards and the impact of effective teaching on the quality of learning is evident in the students' current work. Marking is generally satisfactory and there are examples of outstanding practice, for example, in science; however, inconsistencies remain. The most effective teaching secures high level oral responses from students although opportunities to enhance engagement are missed in some lessons. Examination results already secured in years 10 and the autumn term of Year 11 for publication in the summer of 2010 are likely to continue this trend of improvement. Of those students who left school in 2009, the proportion of who remained within education, employment and training was amongst the highest nationally.

The range of curriculum opportunities provided is good; however, the range of the 'out of school hours' provision is outstanding and governors provide a 'late bus' support two evenings a week to ensure equality of access to students from remote villages. The college's sports specialist status has been instrumental in the improvements to teaching and learning secured. The large numbers of students entered for the new vocational courses developed within this context have already secured results that are likely to be significantly above the current national average.

Behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection and the new behaviour management system received positive comment in the parental and student inspection questionnaires. Similarly, the college has worked hard and, to considerable effect, to improve attendance. The most recent figures are above the national average; in the last year, persistent absence has been reduced to well below the national average.

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The care, guidance and support provided are outstanding; parents and students spoke positively about the nature of the individual support available and students spoke of 'staff going out of their way for you'. Effective academic guidance based on good assessment for learning is helping to raise standards. Governance is good; the minutes of the governing body meetings provide clear evidence of effective support and challenge for senior staff and of a governing body with a clear focus.

The leadership team has done well to bring about the improvements in standards, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, which have been secured in the last two years; self-evaluation is good. The college's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes in mathematics by working with feeder primary schools to enhance progression and raise GCSE outcomes to match those obtained in English.
- Enhance teaching and learning by:
 - eliminating the inconsistencies in marking,
 - focussing student efforts on producing strong oral responses in all lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Attainment on entry has varied significantly in recent years, however, standards at the end of Year 11 have improved. The proportion of students obtaining five higher grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is just above the national average, as is the proportion of students obtaining five higher grades in any subject at GCSE. The examination results secured by the girls have been noticeably stronger than those obtained by the boys for the past two years. The performance of the limited number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds has been in line with that of their White British peers. As a result of personalised education provision, students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those with Aspergers Syndrome are increasingly successful and those who find learning difficult achieve or exceed their targets. Results in English have been strong for three years and there is evidence that outcomes in mathematics have begun to improve. The results secured in the school's specialist sports area continue to improve and early outcomes from the new Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses are very positive.

The students' current learning and performance in the classroom mirror the improvements established in the most recent examination results. In the large majority of lessons, students make good progress. Lesson outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In a particularly strong BTEC lesson on nutrition, tasks were engaging, questioning was skilful, resources were of high quality and learning was driven forward at a brisk pace. The monitoring of classroom behaviour and student progress through the 'star trekking' system is particularly effective in maintaining the students' engagement in learning. Enjoyment and achievement are good, with strengths evident in individual

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achievement, attendance and behaviour, information and communication technology, and English. Inspectors found students to be very positive on 'feeling safe' and observed good procedures to support this view.

A good range of healthy school meals are available, the proportion of students engaged in sport is high and the college provides well considered and effective support for a healthy life style. Overall, the range of workplace and other skills the students develop towards their future economic well-being are good. Significant improvement has been secured in the students' key skills and the proportion of students who leave school to secure places in employment, further education and/or training is well above average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons. In the better lessons, appropriate challenge moved students on at a brisk pace. Teachers used computer based technology and other resources well; they encouraged collaboration in paired and group work, and inspired students to produce work of which they could be proud. Excellent examples were seen of probing questioning where teachers were not satisfied with superficial

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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answers; similarly, inspectors noted accurate matching of lesson activities to the varying needs of the students, self and peer assessment, the use of practical and active approaches to learning, and opportunities to work independently.

Less effective lessons were characterised by extended periods of the teacher talking to the class which resulted in students becoming passive learners. The quality of assessment and marking is not yet consistent within and between departments.

Students who find learning difficult are well supported and make good progress in their learning, particularly when support staff are well briefed at the start of the lesson.

Good curriculum provision supports the needs and interests of students of all abilities effectively, although a small number of parents expressed some disquiet with regard to the option system. Provision has been improved through the introduction of a range of BTEC vocational courses. The broad range of enrichment activities and 'out of school hours learning', is especially good and student engagement is high. Specialist school status has had a strong impact on the curriculum provision, the quality of teaching and learning and the progress made by students in an increasing range of subjects.

The students were very positive regarding the outstanding care, guidance and support they believe they are consistently offered. They were full of praise for the 'out of school learning' opportunities which enable them to seek additional help from staff and make use of the college's computer facilities. Representatives of minority ethnic groups and those from the traveller community noted that 'the college is not racist any more'. Students respond very well to the successful behaviour management policies and appreciate seeing senior staff in their lessons on a regular basis as part of the 'star trekking' system.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have embedded ambition and are driving improvement with a sharp focus on improving teaching and assessment. The principal has clear expectations of the effective classroom practice required; the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by senior staff are accurate. As a result, standards are improving and students make good progress towards challenging targets. Staff and governors go to considerable lengths to ensure equality of opportunity is good.

Governance is good with a clear focus on college improvement and effective management of limited resources. Safeguarding procedures meet all current

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government requirements. Engagement with parents received a number of positive comments in the inspection questionnaires; the progress since the last inspection in this respect, has been at the heart of the improvement in attendance, and the reduction of persistent absence achieved in the last year. Community cohesion has been effective for some time within the local context and the college has just been awarded the International Schools Award. Partnerships with a wide range of community groups and other education providers are a strength of the college's work on community cohesion. Senior staff and governors deploy resources effectively and the college provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents have a positive view of the college and particularly of the progress secured in the last two years. Parents report that teachers know the students well, staff work to ensure that all achieve their potential and that they are happy at college. However, a number feel the college toilets require refurbishment and the students support this view. Some parents raised individual concerns regarding provision but the students' views on these matters contradicted the parental response and inspectors found evidence to support the students' positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Witchford Village College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 150 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 799 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	18	102	68	15	10	5	3
The school keeps my child safe	28	18	103	66	22	14	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	44	30	83	56	21	14	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	20	91	62	24	16	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	18	12	103	71	21	14	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	12	98	69	28	20	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	18	89	60	29	20	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	24	16	99	66	23	15	5	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	12	98	67	28	19	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	13	95	64	28	19	6	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	14	101	68	21	14	6	4
The school is led and managed effectively	25	17	99	68	18	12	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	20	90	60	25	17	4	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Witchford Village College, Ely, CB6 2JA

As you know, your college was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, I would like to thank you for your openness, friendliness and courtesy during our visit. The inspectors enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions. Witchford is a friendly place where staff know you well and many of you noted in the pupil questionnaire how staff care and support you. Inspectors judged this care, guidance and support to be outstanding and we were also impressed by your behaviour and above average rate of attendance. Well done.

The inspectors found that teaching and learning are good and we agree with you that the sports specialist provision is impressive. We believe that the range of curriculum opportunities provided is good and this has helped to improve your academic progress. The standard of your work has improved in the last two years and your current progress is often impressive.

I have asked the principal and governors to:

- improve outcomes in mathematics to match those in English
- enhance teaching and learning by eliminating the inconsistencies in marking, and by focussing your efforts on producing strong oral responses in all lessons.

I shall look forward to hearing about your future successes.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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