

Soham Village College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110909
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337601
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Derrick Baughan 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	1341
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Nicola Close
Headteacher	Dr Carin Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	7 April 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 38 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and two groups of students. They observed the college's work, and looked at the college self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents, students' books, student questionnaires, staff questionnaires and 189 parental questionnaires.

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

- whether the current level of student attainment matched the results in 2009
- whether current students are making sufficient progress in their lessons
- whether some groups of students are making better progress than others
- the extent to which leaders have managed change, embedded improvement and are on track to meet their strategic priorities
- the impact of the college's specialist status in technology and modern and foreign languages, on college performance and community partnerships.

Information about the school

Soham Village College is a large secondary school. It occupies a large site with an adjacent primary school. The college has specialist technology college status, and recently gained specialist language college status. Most students are white British. Very few students speak English as an additional language. Fewer than average students are from minority ethnic groups. The number of students with special educational needs is slightly above the national average. The college has been awarded a British Council International School Award, is a lead school for gifted and talented students and achieved Healthy School Status in 2009. It also has Leading Edge status and been awarded the Becta ICT mark.

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

Soham Village College has a number of very strong features which make it popular with parents and students. Strong pastoral support for all students results in a very caring community where students are successfully helped to deal with life's difficulties. The focus on helping students with special educational needs is exceptionally strong and planning starts before these students join the college. These students make the best of this by achieving consistently above average standards and making outstanding progress during their time at the college. It is not surprising that almost all of the students from the college progress into education, employment or training.

Leaders and governors have managed change well and established a good structure to take the college forward and further develop the range of opportunities available to students. The college rightly prides itself on the impact of its partnerships, both local and international, which contribute significantly to students' development.

Overall, students' achievement is significantly above average, although results for 2008 were not as high as the previous two years. However, the 2009 exam results are the best that the college has enjoyed and course-work results, for the current Year 11 group, indicate this level could be exceeded in 2010. Teaching is good and motivates students who are extremely good at collaborative learning. Such teamwork is not consistent, as some lessons are too teacher directed.

Soham Village College is a safe and harmonious community. Students' behaviour around the college is exemplary with break times showing exceptional social cohesion.

Behaviour in lessons usually reflects this but some students expressed concern about low level disruption in a few lessons, and this was confirmed by inspectors. Students' social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development is outstanding as shown by the inspirational house assemblies, planned and delivered by the students. For example, those as part of anti-bullying week moved students of all years to reflect deeply on the issue. Student discussion in tutorials and lessons displays an extremely well-developed understanding of morality and other issues.

The college knows itself very well. Self-evaluation has been improved and is used well to identify strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation of the quality of lessons has been improved and is rigorous. It focuses very well on students and their learning, and has been used well to improve performance in modern and foreign languages, for example. The college does not yet fully evaluate the impact of improvement actions. However, areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection in 2007 have already been effectively dealt with and that, coupled with the improvement in achievement and strong outcomes, shows good capacity for further improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - increasing the level of student involvement in managing their own learning
 - reducing the amount of teacher-directed activities in lessons.
- Build on improvements already made and drive through further change by improving the rigour of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of improvement measures, at all levels.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment in lessons is good, with attainment by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities outstanding. Student attainment over the last three years has been significantly above average by most measures with that of students with special educational needs being significantly above average by all measures. English and mathematics results have been significantly above average for the last three years. The number of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics in 2009 was high, at 65% and the number achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C also high at 73%.

Progress in lessons is good. The college has worked well to improve students' awareness of their target grades and the level at which they are working. Students have a good understanding of what they need to do to further improve because of effective assessment, good marking and clear feedback. All students have made significantly above average progress, by most measures. Moreover, students with special educational needs consistently progress at rates significantly above average, by all measures. There is no significant difference in progress and attainment by students of different gender or ethnicity.

A very purposeful learning atmosphere exists in a large majority of lessons. Students clearly enjoy their learning and relationships with teaching staff are very good. Collaborative learning is very effective and students work exceptionally well in groups. Learning is not as good in some lessons which are too teacher led. In these lessons progress is not as good as it should be, and leads to some students losing focus.

In discussions with inspectors, all students said that they felt very safe in the school and that instances of bullying were very rare and dealt with quickly and effectively. The students have a good attitude towards healthy lifestyles and talk enthusiastically about the wide range of sporting and extra-curricular activities. Students benefit exceedingly well from the opportunities to contribute to the local and wider community, which they take up in large numbers. Exchange visits and links, including those with schools in Africa, are integrated well together and the combination provides students with an outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Students have an exceptionally well developed awareness of the rights of other people.

Responsible behaviour is the norm. Most lessons are characterised by positive relationships and mutual respect. The college provides a broad range of cultural and arts

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opportunities, particularly in music. It has focused well on improving attendance, now above average and increasing, and punctuality. Coupled with effective measures to drive persistent absence down to well below the national average, and effective work related programmes, students gain good skills for their life beyond school. The excellent guidance they receive means that their progression after leaving college is very good, with virtually all the students leaving in 2009 progressing to education, training or employment.

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	2
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	1
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	1
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Inspectors observed some outstanding practice in lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and relationships between students and teaching staff are very good. In the best lessons, learning objectives are precise and well understood by students. The college's specialisation in technology is apparent with very good use being made of this in many lessons. Teachers are confident in using a range of technology to support learning. Other resources are also used well to engage students. Activities are closely matched to objectives and learning is fast-paced. Assessment of learning is good and helps students

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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to make good, in some cases outstanding progress.

In a few lessons, teaching and learning are not as good as they could be because students are not given as much opportunity to develop their own understanding. Teachers spend too much time leading discussions and do not give students sufficient opportunities to work independently and discuss their ideas.

The curriculum is regularly and critically reviewed. At Key Stage 3 the curriculum is broad, well balanced and meets statutory requirements. Significant features include the opportunity for Year 9 students to study Latin, German or business studies. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum also meets requirements. Since the last inspection in 2007 significant improvements have been made in work-related options and there is a very good balance between academic and vocational options. This was further improved in September 2009 by the introduction of a diploma route, which is proving popular with students.

A very good personal development programme helps students prepare well for their future. Excellent partnerships with a range of organisations, such as Connexions, contribute well to this programme. Arrangements for transition from primary school are comprehensive and flexible. They include a specific package for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, staff visits, locality team projects and gifted and talented days. The college makes significant efforts to ensure students are well prepared for starting Year 7. The support for learners with special educational needs is exceptional and gives them the opportunity to fully achieve their potential.

Information, advice and guidance through Key Stage 4 is similarly thorough and includes careers conventions, work with Connexions, input from further education and sixth-form colleges, and an extremely successful work-experience programme. The student-services team provides exceptional support for all students, particularly those with difficulties. This service is enhanced by outstanding links with a range of agencies and close links with parents involved. Students feel that they are well informed about their options and supported extremely well. The college employs a wide range of approaches to behaviour support, including peer mentoring and innovative ideas such as a 'Boys Academy'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	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?

The headteacher, senior staff and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the college and, together with the increasingly robust middle management, are committed

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to moving the college forward. The strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is beginning to make an impact in the classroom as shown by the improved results in 2009. The vision of leaders, to improve achievement for all students, is shared by all staff and they are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all students.

Leaders and managers communicate consistently high expectations to staff. The majority of staff and a very large majority of parents and students believe that the college is well led and managed. Data is used well, in combination with excellent links with key partners, to help monitor performance. Target setting is realistic and challenging, consequently outcomes are good. However, the monitoring and evaluation of improvements needs more rigour.

The effectiveness of the governing body has been improved and it is now fully engaged in both supporting and challenging the college effectively. Some recent initiatives, such as the involvement of governors in faculty self-evaluation, are helping governors better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college. Relationships are constructive and show determination. Some aspects are innovative, for example governors' response to parental concerns about the health clinic. Governors do not yet do enough to engage effectively with the parents and staff on a formal basis. Evaluation of the work of the governors is not sufficiently robust.

There are no discernible differences in the progress of different groups. The college has a detailed action plan for ensuring equality of opportunity for race and disability. Good support for students for whom English is an additional language is apparent from interviews. The college is a welcoming and inclusive environment for students of all backgrounds.

The college's safeguarding procedures are thorough and effective, and meet all requirements. Child protection responsibilities are clear and staff are appropriately trained to carry out their roles. Individual cases are regularly reviewed, usually in conjunction with the locality team. This multi-agency working is exceptionally well run and allows vulnerable students to be identified whilst still at primary school and means that intervention and support can involve the most appropriate professionals. Although individual cases are reviewed and monitored regularly and thoroughly, the college is developing a more robust way of evaluating the overall impact of its safeguarding policies. Site security measures are comprehensive, and the college invests significantly in this aspect.

A wide range of initiatives help engage the community in often innovative ways, for example the visit by South African students. Their presence and perspective was used to good effect to help college students at a time of loss. The college understands its community well and engagement is good. However, it does not carry out a sufficiently rigorous analysis of the religious, ethnic and socio economic context in order to develop outstanding practice.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	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	1
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

At 14% the rate of parental response to the Ofsted questionnaire was low. However, their responses show generally very high levels of satisfaction with the work of the college. Parental comments are almost all offered as constructive criticism. In a minority of the comments, opinion is sharply divided about a number of issues, for example the change in the catering arrangements. However, the majority of comments were positive and parents are clearly impressed with the college and what it is providing for their children. A few of them took the opportunity to write personal letters of support for the college. A very high proportion of parents felt that the college kept their children safe. A small minority of parents focused on low-level disruption in the classroom and the questions relating to how well the college engages with parents and carers, in that both issues could be improved upon, with which inspectors agreed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Soham 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 189 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1341 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	66	35	110	58	11	6	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	65	35	113	60	6	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	22	117	62	24	13	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	28	108	58	19	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	45	24	124	66	12	6	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	16	112	60	32	17	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	18	118	63	19	10	5	3
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)	51	27	109	58	14	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	26	117	62	15	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	26	94	51	27	15	7	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	20	98	54	27	15	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	51	27	107	58	16	9	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	72	38	101	53	12	6	2	1

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.



25 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Soham Village College, Soham, CB7 5AA

Thank you for the warm and enthusiastic welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your college, which we judged as good. We enjoyed meeting you and watching you learn. We were particularly impressed by your behaviour around the college, especially at break times, which one inspector described as 'a relaxed social event'.

Your school provides a good education. We noted the excellent care, guidance and support that you receive. This helps you develop an outstanding level of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. We were moved by the truly inspirational house assemblies which you planned and delivered yourselves. Your discussions in tutorials and lessons showed a deep understanding of moral and other issues.

You make good progress in your lessons and achieve above-average standards. I personally enjoyed your singing and the discussions that I had with a few of you about why the surface of the planet Venus was hotter than that of the planet Mercury. We were pleased that the exam results in 2009 were good. Your involvement in lessons is good and you work well together in them. We agree with your headteacher that most of the teaching is good but, as you and your parents mentioned in the surveys, also agree that behaviour in a few lessons is not as good as it could be.

The inspection team and the headteacher agree that there are some ways in which the college can improve. Firstly by teachers allowing you more opportunities to manage your own learning and reducing the amount of teacher led activities in some lessons. Secondly by improving the rigour with which they monitor improvements.

You can play your part to help by continuing to work hard and behaving equally well in all lessons. We hope that you do very well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Derrick S Baughan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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