

# Coombeshead College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113522
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	338195
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 March 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robert Pyner

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1358
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	245
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Carole Williams
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms N Prince and Mrs S Manning (Co-principals)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 March 2010
<b>School address</b>	Coombeshead Road Newton Abbot TQ12 1PT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01626 201800
<b>Fax number</b>	01626 201810
<b>Email address</b>	smanning@coombeshead.devon.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Over half of the time during the inspection was spent directly observing lessons and other teaching and learning activities. Inspectors observed 38 teachers and visited 55 lessons. They held meetings with senior leaders, governors, staff and groups of students. Inspectors observed the college's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, college development planning, reporting procedures, governors' information, students' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. Samples of students' work were scrutinised, along with questionnaires returned as part of the inspection from 288 parents or carers, 166 students and 62 staff.

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

- the impact of the action taken by the college to promote good attendance and behaviour
- the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects, with a focus on English and mathematics, and the effectiveness of programmes to improve attainment and progress overall
- the effectiveness of assessment and tracking systems to support high expectations and accelerated progress
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of different groups of students, particularly boys
- the impact of the work of college leaders in improving students' achievement.

## Information about the school

Coombeshead College is much larger than the average comprehensive school and serves the town of Newton Abbot and surrounding area. The college gained Trust status in 2008 and its partners are the BBC, the British Council, Phoenix Education Trust, Exeter University and Sustainability South West. Since 2002, it has been a specialist college for media arts and it is also a training school. The college operates on four sites and shares its sixth-form provision with two other schools.

The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals has been increasing and is now slightly above average. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are well below national figures. There has been an increase in the percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities over the last three years and this is now above average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs has remained stable at broadly the national average figure.

The college has undergone a period of change at senior level over the last 18 months. Following the secondment of the principal in June 2008, an acting principal led the college until retirement in December 2009. Since then, the college has been led by two vice-principals working as co-principals. A new principal has been appointed and takes up his post in April 2010.

**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?**

**4**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

### Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the standards which students attain and the sustained progress which they make in their learning.

Coombeshead has undergone an unsettled period. Changes in senior leadership have been compounded by severe budget difficulties which resulted in redundancies amongst staff and changes in roles within the college, including on the governing body.

Inevitably, this has meant that the staff's morale has been affected. During this time, governors and senior leaders have worked to ensure that the college continues to provide the community with a range of appropriate educational opportunities. In particular, the co-principals have provided stability in challenging circumstances with determination and understanding. However, these difficulties have diverted energies from the drive to overcome a legacy of underachievement. Following support from the local authority, there are some signs of improvement; the college has set a balanced budget, course changes for older students have led to predictions of improved results for this year, teachers appointed to new leadership positions are beginning to develop their roles, and staff and governors are professional in their approach and committed to improvement. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and senior leaders know the college's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, a new principal has been appointed. Taking all these factors into consideration, the college's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

Over time, students attainment and their progress have been significantly below average. The progress made by middle- and lower-ability groups, girls and particularly boys, has been significantly less than could be expected. There was an improvement in achievement in English and mathematics in 2008 following intervention to support selected groups of students, but in the following year the progress for the Year 11 students, both overall and for these subjects individually, was significantly below average once again. Science results remain significantly below average. There is some good teaching but this is not consistent. Where lessons do not include effective pace, varied learning activities and challenge which matches their ability, students' interest wanes and they sometimes disrupt others.

The care, guidance and support offered to the students are good and improving well. Individual needs are supported effectively through the extensive and successful work with external agencies. Attendance has improved year-on-year since 2007 and last year was just about average; the latest data show that this upward trend continues. Students

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are given a good range of opportunities to play a part in the college and wider community, especially through the specialist subjects, for example working on Radio Coombeshead.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise attainment and improve rates of progress, especially in English, mathematics and science, by:
  - rigorously tracking all student progress and intervening appropriately so that all middle- and lower-ability students make at least three levels of progress from Year 7 to Year 11, and the higher-ability group progress by four levels
  - carefully planning intervention activities for students at risk of underachieving and routinely evaluating them to measure their effectiveness
  - reviewing the Key Stage 4 curriculum to evaluate the effectiveness of courses in terms of outcomes and cohesiveness
  - reviewing the structure of the college day to ensure that blocks of time are used in the most effective way to maximise learning.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching by ensuring that teachers consistently:
  - use assessment information to plan lessons that take account of prior attainment and the individual learning needs of students
  - use teaching methods that provide pace, variety, interest and challenge for students of all abilities to accelerate progress and build positive behaviour and attitudes
  - engage students fully in understanding how well they are progressing in their work so they take responsibility for what they have to do to improve.
- Improve monitoring and evaluation at all levels so that:
  - strategies are implemented to enhance teaching skills and share good practice
  - the governing body can use information on students' outcomes and progress to hold leaders to account in a regular and systematic way.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****4**

The quality of learning observed in lessons during the inspection was broadly satisfactory and was closely linked to the effectiveness of teaching. The predicted improvements in attainment are yet to be realised. Since the last inspection, the standards achieved by students have been low. The latest tracking information and predictions for this year show an improvement in overall attainment and progress and senior leaders are confident that these will be achieved. However, this improvement is fragile. The standards observed in lessons and students' books were generally satisfactory, although in some classes students did not make the progress of which they are capable because tasks were not closely matched to ability. Where learning activities are appropriately targeted and challenging then progress is satisfactory for students

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with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The majority of students questioned said they enjoy most of their lessons, especially when they are actively involved. They said that they feel safe, and are confident that any bullying is dealt with appropriately. A small minority of parents responding to the questionnaire voiced concerns about behaviour and this was also a feature noted in the responses of students and staff. During the inspection, behaviour was generally satisfactory, but it was not so secure where teaching was less effective.

Students contribute well to the college community. Each house sends representatives to the college council and this group is represented on the governing body. Students are linked with projects to provide input on effective lessons and are involved with the wider community through the college’s specialism.

The college has developed effective work-related courses and qualifications together with ‘impact days’ for students on work skills in collaboration with the Devon Education and Business Partnership. Most students and their parents or carers note that the college provides satisfactory preparation for the next stage of education or entering the world of work. These factors, as well as improved attendance, a significant reduction in the number of students who are not in education, employment or training and satisfactory ICT provision mean that, despite weaker literacy and numeracy skills, students are reasonably prepared for their future economic well-being.

*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

<b>Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>4</b>
Taking into account: Pupils’ attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pupils’ behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils’ attendance <sup>1</sup>	3

<sup>1</sup> 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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**The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

**3**

## How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, the pace of the work is brisk and activities are carefully planned to meet the needs of specific groups or individuals. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Tasks are challenging and involve a variety of activities such as working with a partner, presenting work to the rest of the class and developing critical thinking skills to make decisions and back them up with evidence. Teachers ask tailored questions to groups and individuals to test their understanding and adapt their teaching as a result. Resources are used well, especially those linking with the media studies specialism to enhance learning. Support staff are generally used well to provide effective individual support for less-able students.

A good example was a history lesson exploring the lives and attitudes of people living in London during the Blitz, where the teacher skilfully used questioning to encourage students to think deeply about life at the time and enhanced this understanding with carefully selected newsreel footage to provide evidence to back up their views. The pace was brisk with a variety of work and activities. As a result, the students developed their understanding and shared their views and opinions using evidence. Relationships were very positive. One student said: 'I love history.'

Where teaching was less effective, activities were not differentiated to match students' ability, too much time was given to routine tasks that were completed quickly and the pace was slow. Most lessons were 100 minutes long and this meant that students sometimes lost interest and disrupted the learning of others.

Teachers use assessment information satisfactorily to support students' learning, but there are some inconsistencies in marking. In the best examples, assessment procedures involved students in taking responsibility for improving their own work.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a range of vocational courses. It was significantly changed last year so that up to four options can be completed over the key stage. The combined year groups generally work well together and the shortened courses mean that vigorous pace can be achieved. The college appropriately plans to reconsider the suitability of some subjects, such as modern foreign languages and expressive arts, using a two-year cycle. There have been recent changes to the science curriculum to make it more appropriate for students.

A wide range of additional activities and clubs enriches learning. Participation rates are good, particularly for sports and activities linked to the college's specialism.

Extensive partnerships with external agencies have a positive effect on the support offered to potentially vulnerable students and their families. Comments from parents and carers note positively this aspect of the college's work. Transition arrangements for students joining the college or for choosing options for further study are effective. The latter include 'speed dating' for subjects, interviews and learning fairs.

The newly appointed director of student services has quickly developed an approach in

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which the learning support, behaviour and attendance team works more closely in partnership. This maximises the impact of the support they can provide to individuals.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b> Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are leadership and management?**

The co-principals have worked effectively in recent times with governors, the local authority and the consultant vice-principal on strategies to improve the analysis of performance, good practice in teaching and learning, and behaviour management. They are also working effectively with the new principal to ensure a smooth transition.

The college has developed good partnerships with other schools and the wider community. This is most effective in the transition arrangements with primary schools for students joining the college in Year 7, the collaborative sixth form and links with other organisations relating to the college’s specialism. A developing area is the work with the partners in the Trust.

Senior and middle leaders share a strong commitment to improving the achievement of students. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning have been further developed recently but analysis and follow-up of these procedures are not sufficiently secure to ensure that the focus is clearly on the achievement of individual students and that the accountability for this rests firmly with the teacher.

The governing body has understandably been focused on the restructuring of staffing at a difficult time. The chair and vice-chair understand the strengths of the college well through, for example, the annual ‘micro-schools’ evaluations, and are firmly committed to improvement.

Procedures for the safeguarding of students are satisfactory. Good information on potentially vulnerable students is used effectively, but data about the achievement of other groups is not used as well to ensure that all groups make similar progress.

The college has satisfactory links with the local community mainly through its specialist subject areas and especially through its provision of the radio station. It also has collaborations with schools abroad. However, it has yet to fully complete its audit of provision, and students’ understanding of contrasting areas of this country is relatively underdeveloped.

The work as a specialist media arts college has made an effective and continuing contribution to the life of the community within and beyond the college. Attainment and progress at GCSE level in media studies, art and drama are above average in the main



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school, although achievement in art and drama in the sixth form is not as strong. The college has initiated some innovative projects, including a media studies course for Key Stage 3 students, which has received national recognition.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>4</b>

## Sixth form

Sixth-form students are invariably courteous and helpful, and generally happy to be at college. Their behaviour is good both in and out of the classroom. They feel safe within attractive surroundings. They know how to lead a healthy lifestyle and there is a strong sense of community at College House. Although the sixth form is almost entirely White British, students have a good understanding of Britain's cultural diversity.

Achievement is broadly average. The curriculum caters for the varied needs of students through effective links with other local sixth-form providers. Assessment strategies are improving so that students now know what they need to do next to improve their work further. However, benefits of this and of the improving strategies for tracking progress do not yet show through in examination results. Students feel that their teachers are helpful and patient.

Teaching seen during the inspection was never less than satisfactory and was occasionally good, but students lack sufficient opportunities to improve their critical thinking skills.

Leadership in the sixth form is satisfactory. There is a strong commitment to improvement and to raising standards of performance.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are happy with their children’s experience at the college in most respects and the large majority feel that the leadership and management of the college are effective and that teaching is good. A small minority feel that the college is less effective in helping parents support their child’s learning, taking account of parents’ suggestions and concerns and dealing with unacceptable behaviour or bullying. The same proportion noted that the college did not help children to develop healthy lifestyles, and some recognised the negative effects of the difficult budget situation and the changes in leadership. The inspection team found that where teaching was less effective, there were instances of low-level disruptive behaviour, but that behaviour overall was satisfactory. They judged the college’s efforts to encourage healthy lifestyles for students as satisfactory.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

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

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 288 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1358 students registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	23	173	60	33	12	12	4
The school keeps my child safe	60	21	200	71	17	6	4	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	20	188	66	39	14	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	59	21	178	62	41	14	5	2
The teaching is good at this school	34	12	181	63	58	20	6	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	9	162	57	76	27	10	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	9	176	62	68	24	4	1
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)	39	14	177	62	42	15	7	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	13	175	61	53	18	8	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	12	145	51	67	23	25	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	9	149	52	73	26	10	4
The school is led and managed effectively	25	9	148	52	63	22	22	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	49	17	176	61	46	16	10	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



Dear Students

Inspection of Coombeshead College, Newton Abbot TQ12 1PT

Thank you all for welcoming the inspection team on our recent visit to your college. Special thanks go to the student guides who helped us find our way around the college on the first day. A great many of you took the time to talk to us and show us your work and we enjoyed our time with you. It was very informative to hear your views which helped us to reach our judgements.

Importantly, your school is helping you to grow up into well-rounded, sensible and positive individuals. You told us that you enjoy school and particularly like the many opportunities provided through your specialism of media arts. You also like the many extra-curricular activities in which you can take part. Your behaviour is satisfactory overall although some of you can be distracted if lessons do not interest you. The college takes good care of students who need extra support. The courses that you undertake are developing well and help you to prepare for the next stage of your education or to begin work. Overall the teaching is satisfactory.

We are concerned that students at your college have not achieved as well as could be expected. The senior leaders have worked hard during a period of change to improve the way the college works so that you can make more progress, but we feel that there is still some way to go before you catch up to where you should be. Therefore, we have issued the college with a 'notice to improve' your academic achievement and the standards that you reach. In particular, we have asked that the college works on these improvements:

- raise attainment and improve rates of progress in all subjects, but particularly English, mathematics and science.
- increase the proportion of good teaching.
- monitor improvements closely so that they can be adjusted to ensure that you all achieve as well as possible.

Inspectors will visit the college to check on progress. You can all support this process by working hard and making the most of the learning opportunities offered to you.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector

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