

Applemore College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116504
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	338832
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Christopher Wood HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	531
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sylvia Barns
Headteacher	Roland Marsh
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 33 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They also visited a year group assembly and tutor time. Inspectors looked at students' work in lessons, records of meetings, monitoring and evaluation, and information relating to the students' academic progress and well-being. They also analysed 214 questionnaires returned from parents.

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

- the achievement of middle and higher attaining students, particularly in Key Stage 4, to ascertain whether the teaching is appropriately adapted and/or sufficiently challenging
- the effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support and the impact that this has had on improving outcomes for students
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, and over time, in successfully addressing areas of underperformance.

Information about the school

Applemore College is smaller than the average comprehensive school. It has been a designated specialist college for technology since 1994. A local authority dyslexia support base (DSB) is also located at the college.

Most students come from White British backgrounds. There are more boys than girls. The number of students who are eligible for free school meals is broadly average. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, while the number of students with a statement of educational needs is similar to that seen nationally

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

Applemore College is a good school that continues to improve, in some areas rapidly. It is emerging successfully from a period of uncertainty. Following his secondment to the college, the permanent appointment of the headteacher from September 2009 has been a significant factor in generating what one astute parent described as the college's 'renewed energy'. The pace of positive change has been noted by staff, students and parents alike. High expectations, perceptive self-evaluation and improving outcomes and provision demonstrate the good capacity to sustain and build upon what has already been achieved.

The interpersonal skills of the students are exceptional. They are polite, courteous and confident. Inspectors were struck by the large number who went out of their way to offer help and to engage in mature and reflective conversation. They are a credit to themselves, their parents and their teachers. Indeed, relationships between students and adults working in the school are, on the whole, very strong. Pastoral care is very well developed and underpins the college's inclusive ethos. As one parent noted, 'I have been very impressed with the way the staff cope with my daughter's difficulties. The SEN department have always responded to any concerns and there is great flexibility in accommodating her needs.'

The attainment of students has improved steadily. Indeed, unvalidated GCSE results for 2009 are the college's best ever, indicating a further rise in the number of students attaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Teaching continues to improve as a result of the college's decisive actions. It is now good with a steadily growing proportion of outstanding lessons. As a result students make good progress in their learning. The use of information about students' prior attainment to plan work that meets a wide range of needs is also improving. However, this is not yet consistent. Consequently, some work is not planned sufficiently well to ensure that students of different abilities make progress at a fast enough rate. The curriculum has been revised so that it now offers a range of academic and vocational opportunities that are better suited to the needs of different students. However, these changes are too recent to have had a sustained impact on raising attainment. The college is conducting a full review of provision and has made judicious plans for future development. These will take time to implement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Use the good quality information that is available about prior attainment to plan lessons that more closely meet the needs of students across the ability range, by:

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- enhancing the skills of students in assessing their own performance and that of other students
- increasing the range of planned opportunities to develop independent and problem solving skills so that work is suitably challenging
- developing further the use of targeted questioning to extend students' thinking, particularly for the most able.
- In line with existing plans, develop the curriculum further so that it better meets the needs and interests of all students, by:
 - extending curriculum choice so that there is greater flexibility
 - providing more regular opportunities for learning outside the classroom
 - increasing the contribution of specialist subjects to the wider curriculum.

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

In lessons, students are enthusiastic, responsive and take pride in their work. They come into their own when given structured opportunities to work independently or in collaboration with classmates. The college has rightly identified middle and high attainers as groups who have, in the past, underperformed. Inspectors found that, as a result of closer monitoring and improved teaching, these groups were making the same good progress as their peers. This is also the case for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

By the time they leave college in Year 11, students' attainment is in line with national averages and has been improving. This trend is consistent in the specialist subjects of technology, mathematics and science. In 2008, students performed particularly well in art and design and English literature. Unvalidated results for 2009 show further improvement in terms of the number of students who attained five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English and mathematics. The number of students who achieve the highest grades is also improving steadily. This secure grounding in the basic skills, science and information and communication technology (ICT), coupled with above average attendance, means that students are well prepared for their future lives.

Students feel safe and trust that teachers will respond to their concerns promptly. As one student stated, 'All the people at this school are very friendly and helpful and very kind.' Some expressed concerns about poor behaviour but many added that this has improved greatly as a result of tighter college systems. Indeed, inspectors found that behaviour around the campus was frequently exemplary and almost always good in lessons.

Students seek out opportunities to contribute to the wider community and say they are keen to participate even more. They feel listened to and have a strong voice. However, some would like to see the college council becoming more active. They enjoy their responsibility as prefects and mentors and regularly raise money for charity. For example, two Year 8 students were undertaking a 'snookerthon' to raise money for a maize grinder for a village in Tanzania. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the

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contribution students had made to the refurbishment of the college canteen. Students noted that the project had taught them important skills of negotiation, compromise, financial planning, presentation and thinking about others. This exciting opportunity is set to be continued through a subsequent landscaping project. Students have a mature understanding of right and wrong and are thoughtful in expressing their views. For example, a stimulating assembly on the theme 'When will there be a harvest for the world?' prompted them to consider issues of the global economy, equality and sustainability. Most students understand the main threats to their health and make sensible choices in terms of their eating and participation in physical activities. However, a small but persistent group continue to make lifestyle choices that are less healthy.

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	3
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?

Secure subject knowledge enables teachers to plan lessons that are interesting and usually proceed at a good pace. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson about bacteria and viruses, students made rapid progress because activities were varied, challenging, built on prior knowledge and encouraged scientific thinking. In the best lessons, teacher

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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questioning is used effectively to probe and challenge students' thinking and there are structured opportunities to evaluate their own work and the work of others. For example, in one Year 11 English lesson, students spoke with clarity about their own progress and what they needed to do to improve because activities were rooted in a thorough understanding of the examination criteria. In some lessons, however, teachers talk for too long and the pace of learning is too slow. Often this is because teachers have not used the information they have about students' attainment to plan lessons that meet the needs of different abilities. In these instances students can lack concentration and lose interest.

The changes that have been made to the curriculum so far have been effective. It now offers a better range of academic and vocational options. As a result, students say that they enjoy their learning more and fewer withdraw from courses that they have started. However, these changes are relatively new and ongoing developments, and while exciting and appropriate, have yet to have a significant impact on attainment. The college's specialist subjects make a satisfactory contribution to the curriculum through their links with partner primary schools and events such as the Year 8 technology theme day and the UK Maths Challenge. However, the impact of the specialism is not comprehensive enough. Students enjoy taking part in extra-curricular activities which are of a good quality. Nevertheless, many say they would like more opportunities, particularly in relation to competitive sport, drama and music.

Good procedures for identifying and supporting vulnerable students begin well before they transfer to the college. These include targeted 'Headstart' groups and a 'Sparkle' day during which students with dyslexia work with Year 11 mentors. Transfer arrangement from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and to post-16 are coherent and successful. One Year 7 parent said, 'The transition period has been very positive. The progress report was very helpful and meeting with the tutor reassured us we had chosen the correct secondary school.' There are effective systems for monitoring attendance. Exclusion rates, although above average, are falling sharply as a result of the college's actions. Positive partnerships with parents and successful liaison with outside agencies, including the local authority, make a consistently strong contribution to the care and support that students receive. One parent echoed the thoughts of others when commenting, 'My daughter is very happy at Applemore and is progressing well. She enjoys sport and attends three clubs a week after school. There are many dedicated teachers and the children benefit from the small classes.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

Under the excellent direction of the headteacher, the small senior team is very effective and the capacity of other leaders is being developed quickly and systematically.

Together, they communicate a compelling vision of what the college needs to do to improve, encouraging high levels of collaboration and collegiality. Consequently, one member of the support staff commented, 'It is a pleasure to come into work. Staff are passionate about the school and are determined to achieve excellent results for all of the students.' This commonly held attitude underpins the college's successful commitment to ensuring that equal opportunities are promoted and discrimination is tackled.

Staff benefit from professional development that is closely linked to the college's priorities. Self-evaluation at all levels is increasingly accurate and reflective. Where it is less rigorous, effective support and guidance are offered by senior leaders. Governors provide confident and wise leadership and involve themselves fully in the college's work. They were also proactive in reducing the college's budget deficit. Accordingly, finances are now well managed. There are many good examples of students working with their peers from different backgrounds, such as mentoring pupils from a nearby special school. The college also has strong links with the Traveller community and welcomes children from Fiji, Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. However, the college astutely recognises that it needs to be more systematic in its planning and evaluation of such activities.

College leaders ensure that policies and procedures for keeping students safe are in place and enacted by staff who receive regular training. As a result of its methodical review of these procedures, the college is now working towards improving systems further.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
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Views of parents and carers

The proportion of completed questionnaires was much higher than the average number of returns received in secondary schools. Most parents were happy with their child's experience at the college and this was consistent between year groups. Although some parents expressed concern about the recent challenges the college has faced, many recognised the immediate and positive impact of the new headteacher. In particular they praised the enthusiasm and dedication of staff, the excellent pastoral care and the friendly atmosphere generated by a small school.

Their main concerns related to inconsistencies in behaviour management. Many comments referred to specific incidents and these were often historical. The headteacher is fully aware of these concerns and his decisive actions, welcomed by staff and students, are beginning to have a discernible impact. Some parents were concerned about inconsistencies in teaching, although this often related to changes in staff and temporary teachers. Other parents were keen to receive more guidance in helping to support their child's learning and some felt that communication between the college and home could improve. However, other parents noted these areas of the college's work as strengths.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Applemore 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 214 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 531 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	72	33	127	59	11	5	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	47	22	157	73	7	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	64	30	128	60	16	8	5	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	24	132	62	22	10	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	41	19	141	66	19	9	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	20	131	61	28	13	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	21	140	65	21	10	1	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)	43	20	139	65	15	7	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	24	130	61	21	10	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	16	125	58	32	15	10	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	17	136	64	24	11	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	53	25	131	61	12	6	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	70	33	119	53	20	9	1	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

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">■ 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.



Dear Students

Inspection of Applemore College, Dibden Purlieu, SO45 4RQ

Recently I visited your college to see how well you were doing. All of the inspectors were extremely impressed by your good manners, openness and helpfulness. I am pleased to say that you go to a good school that is improving.

Your college is well led. You and your parents appreciate the quick changes made by the headteacher, particularly their impact on improving behaviour, which is good. Your teachers care for you, keep you safe and help you learn. Consequently, you are making good progress and getting better results in your exams. This year's GCSE results were the best the college has achieved ' so far. Teaching is good and getting better. Lessons are well planned and teachers know their subjects well. Sometimes the pace of learning is slower and you become restless because work is not sufficiently well matched to your needs. The curriculum, which is satisfactory, has also improved. You now have a wider range of choices that interest you and help you achieve. However, there are further improvements that are under way and these, alongside a greater emphasis on the college's specialism, will make the curriculum even better.

Applemore is a vibrant community. You enjoy coming to school and your attendance is very good. You are very welcoming of students from other backgrounds and enjoy taking responsibility when it is offered through your role as mentors, prefects and your work for charity. I was most impressed with your excellent contribution to the refurbishment of the canteen. Although you feel your voice is heard you would like the college council to be more active. You know how to stay healthy but some of you do not always make the healthiest choices. You enjoy participating in competitive sport, drama and music but would like even more opportunities to do so.

I have asked your headteacher to focus on two things that will make the college even better. Staff at the college want to make sure that:

- lessons are planned so that they are well matched to your different needs
- the curriculum is more varied and provides even better opportunities for you to achieve.

You can help by maintaining the very mature and positive attitudes to learning that you demonstrated during the inspection.

Yours faithfully

Chris Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

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