

# Great Cornard Upper School and Technology College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124797
<b>Local Authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	340656
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Walsh

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>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	663
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	184
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ian Gibbs
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mike Foley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2007
<b>School address</b>	Head Lane Great Cornard Sudbury
<b>Telephone number</b>	01787 375232
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<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@gcus.net

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 29 lessons or parts of lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and documents including the school development plan, records of the schools' monitoring of lessons, records of students' progress and parental questionnaires.

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

- how the leadership and management is tackling minor inconsistencies between attainment in subjects at both GCSE and A level
- the impact of the curriculum on different ability groups and the impact of additional support for students with special educational needs and disabilities and others who find learning difficult
- the use of assessment data in the classroom to inform teaching including matching the work set to students' needs.

## Information about the school

Great Cornard Upper School is a mixed comprehensive school that caters for students aged 13 to 18. It serves an area of relatively low deprivation and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Few students come from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of students with special educational needs and disabilities is below average. The school has technology college status.

**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

Great Cornard Upper School is a good school. The quality of care, guidance and support that is provided for students is outstanding. The school has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection because of the strong sense of direction provided by the headteacher. His supportive manner and open accessible style of leadership is appreciated by governors, staff, parents and students. A typical comment from a student demonstrates the excellent relationships and the very inclusive ethos in school. The student said, 'My class is like a family: we all get on well with everyone.' This illustrates that students feel very comfortable in school. Behaviour is good both in lessons and around school. Students are understandably proud of their school and make a good contribution to the school community.

Attainment is broadly average. When three years results are taken into account, outcomes at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results have improved year on year. In 2009 GCSE results were above average by all measures, with an above average proportion of students gaining five or more higher grades, including with English and mathematics. Attainment is above average in the vast majority of GCSE subjects but, despite improvements, standards remain below average in a very small number of subjects. Inconsistencies between subjects also occur at A level. Students achieve well because of good teaching combined with a good curriculum and the way they apply themselves diligently in lessons. The attachment of learning support assistants to particular departments has resulted in them developing their own subject specific knowledge and teaching skills which has helped to ensure that students who find learning difficult, including those with special education needs and disabilities, make the same good progress as other students.

The quality of teaching has improved well since the last inspection. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that assessment is used to tailor work closely to students' needs. Teachers provide good guidance so that students are very clear about how to improve their work. In subjects where outcomes are not as good, assessment information is not being used as well to set challenging work, the pace of lessons is slower and students are not as well informed about how to improve their work. The curriculum has also been enhanced. Courses have been developed that meet the needs of students who learn at a slower rate than others as well as those who find learning easy. The strong emphasis on developing good levels of literacy and numeracy supports students' progress in other lessons. Students also do well in subjects associated with the school's technology college status. The excellent partnerships with other providers have been used very effectively to extend the range of opportunities available to students.

The development of a strong house system has been a central plank in building a

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structure that scaffolds good achievement. A careful eye is kept on students' progress and any students who are at risk of underachieving are quickly spotted and offered effective support. The roles of the heads of house and the learning mentors are crucial in promoting very high standards of pastoral care. The quality of emotional and academic support for students whose circumstances cause them to be vulnerable, including those with special education needs and disabilities, is exceptional. Consequently, these students progress at the same rate as their peers.

Senior leaders, staff and governors all share a determination to build on the good practice that is being developed in the school. They are aiming high. Many departmental managers have improved their skills since the previous inspection but there is still some work to do to develop the leadership and management of underperforming departments. There is an extensive programme of detailed lesson observations. Currently the information gleaned from these activities is not effectively drawn together by senior managers and used to full effect. Although areas for improvement are accurately identified during observations, occasionally the overall judgement on teaching is too high and this restricts the way the information can be used both to challenge and support underperforming departments. Nevertheless, the school has a very clear idea of its strengths and weaknesses and has well laid plans for improvement. Its capacity for further improvement is good.

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

- Address the inconsistencies between attainment in subjects by:
  - improving the quality of leadership and management in underperforming subjects
  - addressing variations in the quality of teaching, including issues of pace and challenge
  - ensuring that assessment information is used effectively to set work that meets student's individual needs, and that students are informed about how to improve their work in all departments and year groups
  - improving the way information about the quality of teaching is gathered together, monitored and evaluated to support and challenge teachers.

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

When students enter Year 9 their standards of attainment are similar to what is expected at that age. Standards are rising both at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Although three year averages indicate that attainment is broadly average at the end of Year 11, year on year improvements have culminated in above average standards in 2009. Although standards in history and physical education improved last year, GCSE results were still below the national average. Test results show that students in the 2009 cohort achieved well. Current information based on the school's tracking and results of unit tests suggest that this good achievement is being sustained. This is

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because students are acquiring knowledge and developing understanding at a good rate in lessons. They work hard and are keen to do well. The school has kept a watchful eye on students' progress and is particularly careful about analysing the progress of different groups. It has taken immediate action if the progress of any group was perceived to be slow; consequently, the progress of all groups of students is good.

Strong moral and social development is illustrated by the excellent relationships in the school and the way students are able to empathise with and support each other. Behaviour is consistently good in lessons and around school. Only when teaching lacks pace and challenge does background chatter develop. Students enjoy the high staff presence in school and have very good relationships with staff so they feel safe and secure. Students have a good awareness of how to keep healthy and try hard to adopt a healthy lifestyle, although they know that they occasionally eat the wrong things. Students respond well to opportunities to contribute to the school through their commitment to the school council and by acting as mentors. They attend school regularly and are usually punctual to lessons. Above average standards in literacy and numeracy together with confidence with new technology and a good understanding of enterprise and career pathways means that students are well placed for future success.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<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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## How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and share this with students in a way that is easy to understand. Lessons are relatively long and most teachers sensibly vary the activities and teaching styles in order to ensure that students sustain their interest. Many teachers are good at targeting questions in order to challenge students. Relationships are exceptionally good and students feel very confident to answer as well as ask questions. A range of technology is used to make lessons more interesting. Most teachers plan their lessons carefully and use data well to make sure that the work is carefully matched to students' individual abilities. Lessons in some subjects sometimes lack pace and challenge and students are less well informed about how to improve their work.

The continuous refinement of the curriculum and the way it is closely matched to students' requirements has contributed to rising standards. Partnerships are a real strength and the school works with several providers to extend students' opportunities in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Specialist areas have been introduced such as level 1 courses in engineering and there is a variety of work based and vocational courses available. Although the school caters well for those who prefer to learn through practical experiences, it has not forgotten the needs of more academic students. It has improved provision for gifted and talented students since the previous inspection, for example, through introducing the opportunities to study for separate sciences for GCSEs from Year 9. This also reflects the way the school is working to develop the Year 9 curriculum. A wide variety of extra curricular and enrichment activities are very much enjoyed by students. The school is aware that registration time is not always used to best effect and has started to consider how it can improve the delivery of citizenship and personal social and health education lessons.

The standard of pastoral care is exceptionally high and this is reflected in the way students feel at ease in the school. Many students and parents are fulsome in their praise regarding the support they have received from the school and often mention the sterling work of the learning mentors. Vulnerable students and those with special education needs and disabilities are particularly well supported. This well targeted support, enhanced by excellent links with external agencies, has enabled them to make the very best of opportunities provided by the school. Students know they are respected and valued as individuals and have great confidence in the advice that the school can offer. In particular, they have access to high quality careers education which enables them to make sensible decisions about their futures. The school's strategy to encourage regular attendance for all groups of students has led to improving attendance figures, which are now in line with the national average.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<p><b>The quality of teaching</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>
<p>Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate</b> Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has been instrumental in creating a school where both students and staff feel appreciated. The promotion of equal opportunities is central to the school's work and all are able to do their best within an inclusive ethos. Good leadership and management have not only resulted in rising standards but have also ensured that the management of finances and the school site and buildings have improved. Governors take their roles very seriously. They are well informed and are able to provide the school with a good balance of support and challenge. Targets have been challenging and have been used well to ensure that no group of students are underachieving. Within the staff there is a real resolve to improve all aspects of their work. Training has had a good impact on teaching and the quality of middle leadership. There are many skilled heads of departments and the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are particularly well led. However, some departments have relative weakness in their leadership and management, and this is reflected in the way that whole school strategies such as making better use of assessment information have lacked impact in their departments. There have been regular lesson observations involving a wide range of staff. However, the information gained from these observation has not been gathered together by senior leaders nor has its content been carefully monitored. Occasionally the grades given to lessons are too high. This limits the way that less effective departments can be challenged and helped to improve.

The school is very outward looking and uses its technology college status well to reach out into the local community. It has used external support effectively to drive improvements to standards but has also provided important support for the middle school with which it shares a site. Parents find the school exceptionally easy to approach and their concerns are carefully addressed. They receive very good quality information about their children's progress and the school's excellent website contains a myriad of information for parents and students. While the school has an admirable understanding of the local community and good contact with the international community it recognises that much more needs to be done to ensure that students gain first hand experience of people with different backgrounds than themselves. Therefore the school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory overall. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2



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<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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

## Sixth form

The sixth form is becoming increasingly popular because it makes good provision for students. The students in the sixth form have high aspirations and provide good role models for younger students. They are keen to contribute to the school, for example through mentoring younger students, and make a good contribution to the local community particularly through their activities that contribute to the Duke of Edinburgh award. Achievement and standards are improving. Students make good progress and standards are above average, particularly taking into account the proportion who gain A - E grades. However, there are still some inconsistencies between outcomes in subjects. The range of courses has improved because of the flourishing partnership with another local high school. There is now scope to improve the quality and range of level 2 courses. Teaching is good in almost all courses but is less effective in the small number of underperforming subjects such as business studies.

Students thrive in the sixth form because of the high standards of care they receive. Good quality guidance on entry to the sixth form means that students select courses that meet their needs and retention rates are high. This good guidance continues and students are very pleased with the way that they are supported through university applications. Leaders and managers in the sixth form are very good at providing high quality pastoral support for their students, although more needs to be done, particularly at senior leadership level, to ensure that national and school data are used effectively to provide crystal clear information about achievement and attainment.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## **Views of parents and carers**

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Those with children who have not always found learning easy are particularly pleased with the way the school has supported them. A few parents had individual concerns. These concerns were followed up by the inspection team while continuing to ensure parents' confidentiality. It was found that the school was already aware of the majority of these matters and was taking appropriate action.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Great Cornard Upper School and technology 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 101 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 847 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	72	46	75	48	4	3	5	3
The school keeps my child safe	54	34	95	61	3	2	5	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	37	83	53	5	5	10	6
My child is making enough progress at this school	49	31	89	57	4	4	15	10
The teaching is good at this school	43	27	95	61	4	4	15	10
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	21	105	67	7	7	12	8
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	18	108	69	6	6	13	8
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)	56	36	87	55	1	1	13	8
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	31	90	57	4	4	14	9
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	27	92	59	5	5	18	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	20	98	62	3	3	24	15
The school is led and managed effectively	72	46	70	45	4	4	10	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	69	47	69	47	3	3	5	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.**



7 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Cornard Upper School and Technology College, Great Cornard, CO10 0JU.

Thank you for making us so welcome during the recent inspection of your school. It is clear that your school has improved substantially over recent years because of good leadership and management and is now providing you with a good quality education. Although taken over three years attainment is broadly average, last year's GCSE results were above average. You are making good progress not only because of good teaching and a good curriculum but because the vast majority of you work hard in lessons. There are many subjects where you do really well but there are a small number where results could be better. There are several things the school could do to improve standards in these subjects, including making sure the teaching moves along at a good rate and provides you with sufficient challenge. Also, to make sure that assessment information is used to set work that meets your individual needs and that you are clearly told how to improve your work. In addition, the leadership and management of these subjects could be developed and the school could make better use of the information it holds about the quality of teaching.

That said, there are many good things about your school. We were particularly impressed by the way you are cared for each other and the high standard of support offered to vulnerable students and those of you who find learning difficult. Partnerships with others have been used exceptionally well to extend the range of opportunities available to you. There is no doubt that the hard work and commitment of its students is central to the success of the school. Your good behaviour and positive attitudes make the school a very pleasant place to be. It was good to see students with such high aspirations and a determination to succeed.

Good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Susan Walsh

Lead inspector

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