

Cromwell Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110869
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325247
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Middleton HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1074
Sixth form	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C. Barnes
Headteacher	Mr G. Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 November 2005
School address	Wenny Road Chatteris PE16 6UU
Telephone number	01354 692193
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a little larger than the average secondary school. It serves a mainly rural area and is part of the Fenland Partnership of schools providing enhanced opportunities for pupils through shared provision. The school became a specialist humanities college in 2007. The school's sixth form officially started in September 2008 following a steady growth in post-16 courses. The school's achievements include International School, Sportsmark and Healthy School awards.

The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. A very small percentage of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Fewer pupils speak English as a second language than in the average school. Deprivation in the area is below average, as also is the proportion of pupils who claim free school meals but far fewer families have experienced higher education than is the norm.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Cromwell Community College provides a satisfactory standard of education. Its caring ethos is a strength but its strategy to increase pupils' enjoyment and achievement is slow to reach all subjects and pupils.

Pupils start at the school having attained average results in mathematics and science tests but below average results in English. The school's focus on improving standards has been effective in bringing about a steady rise in these subjects. GCSE results similar to national averages indicate satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, many pupils still make better progress between Years 7 and 9 than Years 10 and 11. They also do better in some of their subjects than in others. In subjects such as textiles pupils always do well but in many others results are inconsistent. Performance data is used well by senior staff to monitor pupils' progress and manage targeted support but there are still lessons where activities remain the same for all pupils in the group.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but its impact on learning is widely variable, reflected in pupils' inconsistent achievements. At the last inspection in 2005 the school was asked to increase opportunities for pupils to participate in lessons and to develop their confidence as learners. In classrooms where pupils are stimulated by the teaching methods and convinced about the relevance of lesson content they get actively involved and their good progress is not dependent upon the teacher's close direction. But their ability to grow in confidence as learners and individuals is impeded by low levels of challenge and expectation in other lessons.

Care, guidance and support are good, promoting a strong sense of security and well-being amongst pupils in all years, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The parents who expressed a view to inspectors were overwhelmingly supportive of the school, but a small proportion was not convinced that all pupils behave as maturely as they should. Inspectors observed mostly good behaviour, but in some lessons pupils clearly relied upon the teacher's behaviour management. Pupils' limited use of self-review, reflection, and responsibility for themselves contrasts with their good social, moral and cultural development when working with, or for, others. Their supportive roles around school, arts performances for the community, charity work, provide examples of good collaboration, care and concern for others.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Individually there are effective senior and middle managers but their work together has not yet focused sufficiently on making the school's vision of an outstanding school a reality. Governors share the principal's breadth of experience and ambition for the school and increasingly demonstrate the impact of their challenge as well as support. A talented team of staff in the 'teaching and learning group' adds impetus by showing what is possible at Cromwell. Capacity to improve is satisfactory; whilst the previous inspection issues are not all resolved, specialist status has rapidly accelerated improvement in the specialist subjects. The school's progress towards making improvement more widespread is supported by accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The recently established sixth form provides a good choice of AS and A level courses with its partner institution and has appropriate plans to enhance the range of vocational options. Students with a wider range of ability than that often found continue into the sixth form. Their achievement is satisfactory overall but their inconsistent performance across different subjects and underdeveloped study skills at the start of Year 12 contribute to low staying-on rates into Year 13. Standards at the end of Year 13 are broadly average. Achievement is consistently good in English and psychology. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, the best lessons teaching students how to develop and apply the independence and initiative that is valued by employers and higher education, but not all students refine these skills. Personal development is otherwise good, evident in their contribution to the school and wider community. Staff are committed to raising students' aspirations and support their encouragement with good guidance. However, the rudimentary tracking system does not always lead to swift enough analysis of students' needs to keep them on track.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards across the curriculum by ensuring that the features of good practice in teaching and learning are applied consistently across the school
- Use strategic planning more effectively to ensure that the roles, responsibilities and actions of staff at all levels combine to accelerate the school's improvement
- Ensure that pupils reflect on, develop and use their own experiences, ideas and skills as individuals in order to complement their success as a school community

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils join the school generally having reached standards in national tests typical of their age, but literacy skills are often a weakness. Most pupils reach or exceed their targets in Year 9 tests, achieving standards in line with schools nationally. At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils at the school achieving five or more higher grades, including English and mathematics, is broadly average. Whilst results have fluctuated in many subjects those in English, mathematics and science have consistently improved to reach national averages. Pupils generally achieve the targets set by the school, including those set to measure the impact of specialist school status. However, consistently high results in subjects such as textiles and more recently media studies, indicate that higher grades are within the reach of many pupils. For a small but significant minority of pupils low literacy skills or patchy attendance slows their progress across different subjects. Overall, the progress made by boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory, but many make better progress in some subjects than in others, and in the core subjects progress slows in Key stage 4, as pupils are expected to do more for themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The pupils interviewed said they felt safe and secure, and that staff would act promptly in response to any concerns they had. Pupils are reassured by initiatives such as the recent anti-bullying charter (ABC). They value the range of opportunities to take on extra responsibilities around school and a high proportion participates in out of school opportunities. A strength of pupils' personal development is their willingness to collaborate and support each other; work experience reports indicate that these skills will serve them well in their futures. Their confidence in working independently or reflectively to express personal views, experiences or insights, is less well developed.

The work of the school council enables the shared views of pupils to make a difference; they are involved in a wide range of activities from the 'building schools for the future' consultation process through to interviewing new staff. Community involvement is good. For example, in whole school events and performances they celebrate their enjoyment in working together, and charity fund-raising events widen pupils' horizons. The learning partnership with a school in Zambia adds to the school's international dimension and pupils' understanding of the global community. Pupils' show responsible attitudes to developing a healthy life-style, valuing the courses, activities and services of outside agencies which focus on their well-being. Most pupils attend school regularly and behave well. However, a small but significant minority of pupils do not overcome absence or less effective teaching themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are good lessons characterised by effective planning to support pupils' individual needs; activities that stimulate pupils' interest; and objectives that make the relevance clear. In these lessons pupils achieve well, enjoy learning, and take an active part. In a Year 8 religious studies lesson observed challenging and varied tasks engaged all pupils. One pupil, working hard to overcome his learning difficulties, expressed praise for his teacher. In a Year 10 science lesson the teacher used computer imagery and text to make challenging concepts easy to understand. In discussion, pupils were able to draw on their prior learning because the lessons were memorable. However, not all lessons are equally good. In weaker lessons the content lacked challenge, the purpose remained unclear and too little was made of pupils' skills in working together. Expectations of what pupils could find out or manage themselves were too low, particularly for the more able pupils. The use of assessment is also inconsistent, particularly in providing opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own progress, respond to teachers' marking or set and reach targets together. Nevertheless, the good relationships between teachers and pupils provide a secure basis to build on. The 'teaching and learning group' draws on innovative and exciting teaching within the school, setting a high standard for pupils and all teachers to aspire to.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. The range of academic and vocational options is adequate to meet the needs and aspirations of most pupils. However, the popularity of courses such as the hairdressing and beauty course and take-up into the new sixth form show that the school's plans to develop more 'personalised' pathways are justified. Different courses for different ability groups start in Year 7 in some subjects, leading to an early start on the GCSE courses in mathematics and science for the more able pupils. However, not all subjects take sufficient account of pupils' prior achievements or experiences in planning the curriculum. Specialist school status is making a significant contribution to improving progression and pupils' performance by providing an effective curriculum, with relevant lesson content and enrichment. Other improvements are clearly focused on developing the skills that pupils need to make the most of life: separate citizenship and personal, social and health education courses; additional English lessons to help pupils improve their literacy skills; and extra opportunities to gain a qualification in the use of information and computer technology, for example. Work experience and enterprise projects provide good opportunities for pupils to apply their learning and a small proportion of pupils also follow a college course. Additional opportunities to get actively involved in arts and sports are popular with pupils. So too are the features that add interest and relevance to the curriculum such as visitors, outside visits and cross-curricular initiatives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school has an inclusive and caring ethos that supports pupils' welfare consistently well as they progress through the school. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are in place. Strategies to improve attendance are effective; it is now in line with the national average. The school has worked well with parents and outside agencies to address the persistent absence of pupils, identified as a concern. Vulnerable pupils are supported well through alternative curricular and extended provision, a dedicated learning environment in which to learn and well-informed staff to assist. The introduction of 'progress leaders' is starting to make the various monitoring, evaluation and intervention processes used across the school more cohesive but their impact on pupils' achievement is not yet evident. Whilst not all teachers are aware of the approaches used in different subject areas, parents and pupils in all years expressed an overall sense of strong care, guidance and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. A good feature is the impact of specialist humanities status, because it is sharply focused on improving pupils' experiences and achievements in relation to clearly defined starting points. This indicates satisfactory capacity to improve further when account is also taken of better results in English, mathematics and science. However, progress is slower in improving whole school performance. The senior leadership team has evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately. The skills and experiences of governors and middle managers have more recently been fully utilised to re-enforce

the need for, and direction of, change across the whole school. Individuals effective in their own areas of responsibility have nevertheless had less impact as a team. The headteacher rightly has high hopes for the school and whilst the school's aspirations are expressed clearly they are unsupported by sufficient long-term strategic planning.

Performance data is used well by senior staff to monitor pupils' progress and manage targeted support, but different approaches for individual pupils within an ability group is still not a reality in some lessons. The school as a community and its interface with the local, national and global communities are strengths of the school. Parents value the increased opportunities to get involved in the work of the school and several expressed views to inspectors that illustrated their willingness to acknowledge the school's successes and to challenge the things that could be better. This is also true of governors who are active in promoting the school but mindful of the competitive culture in the wider world. An example is their awareness of staff recruitment difficulties in the area. These have impacted on the progress of some pupils, but governors are determined to overcome difficulties by developing an ethos that attracts high quality staff. Resources are managed well and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

28 November 2008



Inspection of Cromwell Community College

Dear Students,

On behalf of the inspectors who visited on the 26 and 27 November I would like to thank you for welcoming us into your school. We appreciated the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in lessons and in discussions. We think that you might like to know our views of the school.

What we liked about your school:

- your results in English, mathematics and science have improved
- you enjoy the lessons that challenge you to get actively involved
- your school has a caring and supportive ethos
- you get on well with your teachers and each other
- your school knows itself well and rightly believes it can be the best
- you have an increasingly wide range of options, including a sixth form now
- your contribution to the school and wider community is good
- you understand the importance of a 'healthy lifestyle'

What we have asked your school to do now:

- ensure that you all benefit from the best teaching
- show how everyone can contribute to the school's aim to be 'outstanding'
- enable you to develop and use your individual experiences, ideas and skills

We wish you every success in making your contribution, by working hard as individuals to build on the good work you achieve together.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector