

Robertsbridge Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114588
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338411
Inspection dates	30 September–1 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	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	609
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cathy Burke
Headteacher	Karen Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 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 32 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They also visited assemblies, tutor time and a session of the college council. 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 74 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 boys and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly in Key Stage 4, to determine whether teaching is appropriately adapted and/or sufficiently challenging
- the impact that changes to the curriculum have had on raising attainment, including the contribution made by specialist subjects
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in addressing areas of underperformance.

Information about the school

Robertsbridge Community College is smaller than the average comprehensive school. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. There are more boys than girls in most year groups. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below average. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, whilst the number of pupils with a statement of educational needs is slightly above that seen nationally.

The school has been a designated specialist college for mathematics and computing since 2004.

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

Robertsbridge Community College is a good school that continues to improve under the determined and aspirational leadership of its headteacher. As a result of her decisive actions and the commitment of staff, notable improvements have been seen since the last inspection. The curriculum, which is now good, has been substantially restructured and provides students with a broad, balanced and increasingly personalised experience. As a result of improved provision, the proportion of students who attain five A* to C grades including English and mathematics has risen above national averages, improving at a faster rate than seen nationally. Students achieve exceptionally well in the specialist subject of mathematics.

An atmosphere of calm pervades the college and there is a tangible sense of belonging to a community in which all are valued and accepted. Staff and students work together with pride so that everyone can flourish. Partnerships are outstanding. Through its promotion of extended services, its leading role working with local schools and excellent links with other agencies, the college has ensured that the well-being of its students and those from partner schools has improved. One parent, echoing the views of many, said of their son, 'I believe this school will help him fulfil his potential and realise his valuable contribution to society. He is aiming high and is always encouraged by his teachers.'

The quality of teaching in the college is good. Some is outstanding, but the quality remains inconsistent and the detailed information that teachers have about how well students are doing is not always used to adapt the learning to meet the needs of different groups of students. Regular monitoring of lessons provides the college with an accurate view of their strengths and weaknesses but this information is not used sufficiently well to improve the standard of teaching and learning.

Self-evaluation by senior and middle leaders is perceptive and consistently leads to well-formulated improvement plans. Monitoring and evaluation routinely provide the college with a platform for swift action to tackle areas that are judged to be underperforming. For example, insightful analysis of the performance of different groups of students has led to the setting up of a 'narrowing the gap' group of heads of house and subject leaders in the core areas of English, mathematics and science. Although relatively new, this innovative group has built well on previous whole-school approaches to targeting and mentoring underperforming students. Such well thought out systems, alongside better provision and outcomes, demonstrate a good capacity in future years to sustain and build upon improvements already made.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Use existing information about students' prior attainment to ensure that lessons are planned more closely to meet the needs of students across the full ability range.
- Use the information gained from lesson monitoring to improve further the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - increasing the range of opportunities for students to develop their independent learning and problem solving skills
 - enhancing the skills of students in assessing their own performance and that of other students
 - developing further the use of teachers' questioning to encourage and extend high quality discussion amongst students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In lessons, students are keen to do well and apply themselves fully to the range of activities they are offered. This is supported by their good behaviour and positive relationships with staff. They take pride in their work and enjoy participating in class discussion. The college has rightly identified boys and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities as groups who have, in the past, underperformed. Prompt action, well understood by staff, has been taken to address these issues and is beginning to have a positive impact. As a result, inspectors observed that these groups were making progress at the same good rate as their peers.

Students make good progress during their time at the college. Attainment by the end of Year 11 is broadly average, although it is usually higher in the core subjects. In 2008, the college achieved its best results, with a significant rise in the number of students attaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. Unvalidated examination results for 2009 show a fall on the previous year but, taken together, indicate a rising trend. Furthermore, achievement in mathematics has been consistently outstanding over time and underpins the subject's strong contribution to the college's specialist status. This secure grounding in the basic skills, science and information and communication technology (ICT), coupled with improving attendance, means that students are well prepared for their future lives.

Students of all ages have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and act responsibly both in lessons and around the college campus. They are extremely confident that issues are dealt with promptly and feel exceptionally well cared for by the staff who look after them. As one Year 8 student commented, 'There is always someone to talk to. If you are struggling, the teachers are always there to help.'

The active college council is well respected and represents the views of the entire

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school body. Students enjoy the responsibility they take on as prefects, mentors or sports leaders. Whether working with primary children, raising money for charity, designing headdresses for the local carnival or cooking for the elderly, the students' help and support are highly valued. Consequently, their contribution to both the school and wider community is outstanding.

Students understand the importance of good health and the majority are committed to adopting healthy lifestyles. Many participate in and enjoy the range of sporting opportunities that are on offer. Students have a strong sense of justice. They are tolerant and demonstrate a willingness to engage with ideas and opinions that are not their own.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers consistently demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Clear objectives and learning outcomes are identified in most lessons, which commonly proceed at a good pace. In an outstanding geography lesson, for example, students made rapid progress because the activities were planned and timed in such a way as to stimulate high levels of thinking, reasoning and speculation. Questioning is also generally used effectively to extend and challenge students' understanding. In one history lesson, focused on the suffragettes, the students' ability to articulate a reasoned argument about a complex ethical issue was developed productively as a result of the teacher's precise and skilful questioning. Inspectors also observed some good use of self-assessment and peer assessment, supported by effective feedback from teachers.

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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Where this was the case, students could talk confidently about their learning and understood what they needed to do to improve their work.

However, the best practice is not consistently seen in lessons. Teachers sometimes talk for too long and students are not always given sufficient opportunities to take ownership of their learning. In particular, the good assessment information that is available to teachers is not yet used sufficiently well to plan lessons that are closely adapted to the needs of different students. Consequently, in these instances, students' learning and progress are slower than in the more successful lessons.

The curriculum has improved greatly since the last inspection, contributing to improving outcomes. Students can now study a range of academic, vocational and non-accredited courses. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum has been revised and is now taught through discrete lessons in Key Stage 3 and theme based 'drop down' sessions in Key Stage 4. Other recent developments have included the introduction of a diploma in information technology. The specialist subjects, in particular mathematics, make a good contribution to the curriculum. Wisely, the school is monitoring closely the changes it has made at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Students are also able to extend their talents in sport, drama, art and music through a well-devised extra-curricular programme. A range of educational visits help students to put their learning into context. Recent drama productions such as *Oliver* and *Toad of Toad Hall* have involved high numbers of students and were exceptionally well received by audiences.

Support for vulnerable students is comprehensive and tailored to need, and involves high levels of outside agency support and good involvement of parents. There are strong and improving links with primary schools and the arrangements for transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 are well developed. Good advice is offered to students when choosing their Key Stage 4 and post-16 options. As a result of the college's coordinated actions, good progress has been made in improving attendance, in particular reducing the number of students who are frequently absent. Where problems arise, the school acts promptly. For example, one parent noted gratefully that 'a recent bullying issue was dealt with immediately and effectively'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels communicate a clear and compelling vision which

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is shared by members of the college staff. As one subject leader confidently stated, ‘We’re a small school that wants big progress.’ The strong and cohesive senior leadership team has been successfully restructured and is focused resolutely on tackling weaknesses and building on existing strengths. This, alongside the highly successful partnerships and strong engagement with parents, has led to improving outcomes for students. Good use is made of a range of monitoring activities by leaders at different levels. These provide the school with an accurate view of how well students are doing. Some systems, however, are relatively new or developing and have yet to have a full impact on raising attainment or accelerating progress. Rigorous monitoring of the performance of different groups, coupled with decisive action to narrow existing gaps, demonstrates the college’s commitment to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. Self-evaluation is good throughout the college. Where analysis is less searching or action plans need a sharper focus, senior leaders are quick to provide appropriate support and guidance.

The college knows its community well and promotes cohesion particularly well within the school and in the surrounding area. However, it has also extended the range of meaningful opportunities available to engage with students from other faiths and backgrounds. For example, representatives from the college benefited greatly from providing prefect training to fellow students in an inner-city, culturally diverse school. The college is right to prioritise the further development of such opportunities as a means of preparing students even better for later life in multicultural modern Britain.

The governing body has a broad range of expertise and shares the college’s high aspirations for what students can achieve. Governors are supportive of the college but do not shy away from timely challenge. Through their developing role as link governors, they have become increasingly active in collaborating with departments to secure further improvement. Clear policies and procedures for safeguarding are enacted thoroughly and monitored so that young people are kept safe at all times.

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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money

2

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents are supportive of the school's work in all areas. Indeed, overall the responses were consistently more favourable than those seen nationally. In particular, parents appreciated the calm and positive atmosphere in the college and recognised astutely the work that it does to foster community spirit, enabling students of all ages to mix and make good progress.

Parents also praised the work of senior staff and teachers, who were commonly described as encouraging, friendly and approachable. Several noted, in particular, the support that their children had received from staff and older pupils in helping them to settle, with one parent describing transition arrangements as 'fantastic'. Others commented that, because of the good teaching and positive relationships, their children felt confident, happy and challenged. One parent stated that their child 'has gone from a just average achieving child to A band. I could not be happier'.

A few parents expressed concerns about minor or specific behaviour issues. A very small minority of concerns related to the quality of communication between the school and the home, particularly in terms of the clarity of the information they receive about attainment and progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Robertsbridge Community 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 74 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 609 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	42	39	53	2	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	32	43	40	54	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	38	39	53	5	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	31	44	60	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	27	37	42	57	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	22	49	66	6	8	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	27	51	69	2	3	0	0
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)	22	30	45	61	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	34	44	60	2	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	34	38	51	7	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	26	45	61	3	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	49	33	45	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	50	33	45	1	1	0	0

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 all 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

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 pupils' 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.



2 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Robertsbridge Community College, Robertsbridge TN32 5EA

You may remember that I visited your school recently with a team of inspectors to see how well you were doing. We were all very grateful for your warm welcome and the time you took to talk to us so openly. Here are some of the main things that we found out:

- You go to a good and improving school. Your school is well led and you and your parents appreciate the work done by the teachers to care for you and help you learn. You have been doing better in your examinations and more of you are getting good grades at GCSE, including mathematics and English.
- You feel very safe in the school and know there is always someone to turn to if you need help. When you are given the opportunity, you enjoy meeting and working with students from different backgrounds. You contribute extremely well to the community through your work as prefects, mentors, members of the college council and the many events that you support in the local area.
- Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Almost all of you are polite, courteous and work well together to give the college such a strong sense of community. Your attendance is also getting better.
- You enjoy your lessons and make good progress because they are usually well planned by teachers who really know their subjects. However, sometimes you don't get enough opportunities to work independently.
- The curriculum has improved a lot since the last inspection and this is helping you to do better. You particularly enjoy taking part in sporting and drama activities and your recent productions such as *Oliver* and *Toad of Toad Hall* were very successful.

I have asked your headteacher to look at improving some areas of the school's work so that it is even better. All of the staff at the college are keen to make sure that:

- information about how well you are doing is used more consistently to plan lessons that challenge you and help you to do better in your work
- you have more opportunities to work independently, discuss your learning, and think about what you need to do next to improve.

You can help by continuing to work hard and participating fully when your teachers give you work that is challenging and requires you to think.

Yours faithfully

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

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