

Brixham Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113527
Local Authority	Torbay
Inspection number	311307
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	1019
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Morey
Principal	Mr C P Turner
Date of previous school inspection	October 2004
School address	Higher Ranscombe Road Brixham TQ5 9HF
Telephone number	01803 858271
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Age group	11–16
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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

Brixham Community College is an average-sized secondary school which serves the coastal town of Brixham, although the college takes students from an increasing number of primary schools across Torbay. The community in which the college is situated is one of average socio-economic mix. The percentage of students for whom English is an additional language, or who are from minority ethnic groups, is very low. The college has an above average percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the percentage with a statement of special educational need is below average. The presence of grammar schools in Torbay has an impact on the number of higher attaining students at the college. The college manages the local authority enhanced specialist provision for students with autistic spectrum disorders. Brixham Community College is a specialist visual arts college and has achieved a range of awards for its work, most recently one for Investors in Careers and Work-Related Learning, the International Schools Award and a 'Futures Visions' award from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brixham Community College is a good school. It has a deservedly good reputation for its inclusive approach and for the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides for its students. One parent wrote, 'The student pastoral care is second to none.' The college has also developed increasingly robust systems for tracking students' progress and has a very accurate picture of how well students are doing. The college leaders have used that data well in the last few years to identify students who were underachieving. They have then put in place intervention strategies to ensure students are supported but also challenged to do better. Students arrive at the college with broadly average Key Stage 2 tests scores but with literacy levels which are clearly below average. Targeted intervention, particularly in English, has resulted in students making good progress overall by the end of Year 9 and achieving standards which are slightly above average. Standards by the end of Year 11, whilst remaining below the national average, have risen steadily over the last three years, particularly in terms of the percentage of students who have achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Results have improved for Year 11 students even though their levels of attainment on entry have been declining, and represent good progress for those students. The college has focused appropriately on improving students' skills in English and mathematics, and its leaders are aware that their challenge now is to raise standards in all other subjects.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students say they feel safe and enjoy college. One student told inspectors, 'There is no need to inspect us, we're a good school.' Students' contribution to the community is first rate and is very well supported by the excellent partnerships the college has developed, particularly through its specialist status in visual arts. The specialist provision for students with autistic spectrum disorders is a particular strength. Students are generally considerate in their behaviour towards each other around the college, but their behaviour overall is satisfactory rather than good. A number of students and their parents expressed concern that excessive chattiness of some students in lessons prevented their peers from learning as well as they might. Inspectors agreed with these views.

Teaching and learning are good overall. There is, however, variability in the teachers' skills. There is some good and outstanding teaching in a range of subjects, and in these lessons there is good pace and activities engage, challenge and interest the students. There are also some lessons where excessive teacher talk limits students' active involvement or leads to students pursuing their own social discussion rather than focusing on the task in hand. Students' learning is, however, greatly supported by an outstanding curriculum which is exceedingly well enhanced by enrichment opportunities for students of all abilities. There is a high level of personalisation at Key Stage 4 and the new faculty structures and timetable are enabling some innovative practice in delivering the Key Stage 3 curriculum. The college's specialist status in visual arts has very effectively enhanced provision in all creative media subjects. The college has met its specialist school targets and is the lead institution for the new creative and media diploma.

The leadership and management of the college are good and the governing body fulfils its duties well. The principal and the senior leadership team are clearly focused on raising standards and on developing their students well. The recently changed faculty and timetabling structures have been developed as part of the drive for improved achievement with an aim to increase creativity and collaboration. It is too soon for the leadership team to have completed any formal evaluation of the impact of these innovations on students' learning. Strategic planning is good and senior leaders monitor the teaching regularly. The role of the middle leaders in monitoring teaching is currently underdeveloped. The college's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding. The college has taken effective steps to promote improvement since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the successful work done in raising standards in targeted subjects to improve students' achievement in all other subjects.
- Reduce the amount of off-task chatting by students in lessons.
- Empower middle leaders to take a greater role in monitoring, so that good practice in teaching and learning can be shared and the quality of all classroom practice brought up to that of the best.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards as measured by the national tests at the end of Year 9 improved from significantly below average in 2005 to slightly above national average in 2007. The progress students have made has also steadily improved and was significantly above average in 2007. The outcomes of the tests in 2008 are as yet unclear, as re-marking has not been returned. Teacher assessments, which have historically been accurate, indicate that there was a slight drop in the test results overall. The attainment on entry of this year group was, however, below that of the previous year.

Although standards at the end of Year 11 have remained below average, there was a steady rise from 2005 to 2007 in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades at GCSE. College data indicate that there has been, at the same time, a steady decline in attainment on entry. The unvalidated data for 2008 indicate that this rise has continued and that there has been a 10% rise in the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics since 2006. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment has also been narrowed. Results improved in a range of subjects in 2008, including in mathematics, but many of these were from a low baseline. Whilst these improvements have been significant for the college, the senior leaders are aware of the need to raise standards and improve achievement more widely across the curriculum.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well at the college.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The positive ethos of the college promotes the students' moral and social development well through assemblies, in lessons, clubs and charity events, and through the good role modelling of the staff. Students have a sound sense of right and wrong and they feel that their voice is heard and that they can influence decisions affecting the student body. Fundraising activities for charities are chosen, organised and supported well by the students themselves. The spiritual development of students is promoted well within the curriculum, particularly through assemblies and the citizenship course. Art and poetry help students to express deeper thoughts through imaginative expression. Different faiths and philosophies are explored in religious education and time is provided for quiet reflection. However, opportunities are missed to provide, for example, a short reflection or thought for the day in the tutor groups. The cultural development of students is promoted well through participation in a good variety of visits and enriching multicultural experiences such as the visit of the touring Rwandan group, as well as links with South Africa and other countries.

The college takes effective steps to deal with incidents of bullying so that students feel safe and secure. They are safety conscious both in and out of lessons. Attendance levels have steadily improved because of the very effective steps taken by the college and they are now in line with the national average. Students have an informed awareness of developing healthier lifestyles and have, for instance, been instrumental in the introduction of healthier menus available in the canteen. The majority of students take advantage of the very good provision for sports and other enrichment activities which promote a healthier lifestyle. They make good progress in developing those qualities which will prepare them for a life of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good or better lessons start very briskly and with all students well equipped and ready to learn. Relationships are strong and supportive, as demonstrated in the way work is talked about, displayed or performed. Constructive criticism is given, by both teachers and students, in support of learning. Most teachers know their students well and exploit their potential. Assessment information is shared with students, who, in turn, are aware of their learning gains and what needs to be done to reach the next grade or level. Some good examples of high quality marking and verbal advice were seen during the inspection but also some more limited responses.

In the good or better lessons, work is matched well to students' needs and teachers encourage independent learning. However, these are not consistent features and in some lessons a lack of challenge and weaker classroom management skills mean that some students lose interest and learning is subsequently disrupted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The college provides an outstanding curriculum that provides extremely well for all students. The identification of, and enrichment for, gifted and talented students and those with learning difficulties and or disabilities are integral to the curriculum. The personalised pathways at Key Stage 4 offer students a wide variety of courses which have a very positive impact on motivation and attendance. Particularly effective has been the work of the Skill Force team, who have worked with students who might otherwise have been disenfranchised from education and who have been given the confidence to aim for success. The curriculum is enhanced considerably by a wide range of activities including sports, music, visual and performing arts and a variety of educational and recreational trips both home and abroad. These are well supported by students and much valued by them and their parents. The college has used the option of early entry well to extend the range of students' qualifications, particularly in the specialist subjects. The college's specialist school status plays a key role in students' personal development and their wider education. Students have access to a wide variety of arts qualifications and many students involve themselves in a rich programme of activities inside the college and in the wider community. The impact of the specialism can be seen not just in the college but also in the community through, for example, the Heritage Environmental Art Trail which is used by various local groups. The impact also extends internationally; for example, a piece of artwork was jointly created with local primaries and a school in Moscow.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Child protection procedures are robust and all staff have had comprehensive training in identifying the signs of child abuse or neglect. The quality of the planning for all students' welfare and the care shown are outstanding. The tracking of the academic progress of all students is very effective because there is early intervention and a subsequent coherent programme of support offered by tutors, heads of house and personal achievement leaders. The enhanced specialist provision for students with autistic spectrum disorders is placed at the heart of the college and is an outstanding resource, not only for those children but also for those who display similar symptoms. Very successful efforts are made to integrate these students into the mainstream wherever possible and the provision is highly valued by parents. Students are very well prepared for their future lives through careers guidance, fruitful work experience placements and strong links with external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal and the senior leadership team set a clear direction for the work of the college. Targets for students' progress are becoming more challenging each year and these targets are well informed by increasingly accurate predictions.

The quality of the college's strategic planning is good and this leads to appropriate priorities for development that are linked across the college and focused on all areas of students' development. It is not as clear in the plans exactly how senior leaders evaluate the actions taken. The heads of faculty, some of whom are very new in

post, are well supported by senior leaders, are encouraged to be innovative, and appreciate the responsibility they have been given. They have positive views about the benefits of cross-curricular working. Senior leaders monitor the teaching across the college and use external support well to moderate their judgements. However, the outcomes of the observation programme are not yet being used effectively to identify areas with the strongest teaching and then to support the sharing of good practice. Heads of faculty and other middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in the monitoring of teaching and learning in their areas. This is partly due to the fact that timetabling constraints and the new structure of the college day make it harder for middle leaders to monitor the teaching of their own team.

Governors fulfil their duties well and bring with them a broad range of skills. They undertake appropriate training which equips them to provide effective support and challenge in their strategic role and thus ensure the college provides good value for money. They are proud of the college and its high profile in the community.

Provision for community cohesion is outstanding. A range of activities engages students with the local community very effectively, and college facilities are widely used for the benefit of the local community. The students' understanding of the United Kingdom and global communities is enhanced through the curriculum and enrichment activities. This helps them learn about, and understand, others and value diversity in multi-cultural Britain.

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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
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No



21 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Brixham Community College, Brixham, TQ5 9HF

As you know, four inspectors recently visited your college. I am writing to tell you what we found. Thank you very much for talking to us so willingly and openly, for being so polite and for making us feel so welcome.

You told us that you think you go to a good college and the inspectors agree with you. We believe that your college values all its students equally and provides them with outstanding care and guidance. We also believe that the support they give to you personally and to keep you on track in your work is excellent. As a result, you make good progress in the five years you are at the college. In the last few years, the college has worked hard to help students improve their English and mathematics skills. They have been increasingly successful, but the college now needs to look at all the other subjects as well.

We think you are developing well as young people who value their education. We think that you get involved well in college life and in projects in Brixham and much farther afield. We think that some of you could concentrate more in lessons and not disturb others with your chat. We think you are helped to learn by good teachers and by a curriculum which is very well tailored to your needs and has plenty of enrichment activities for you. You told us you really appreciated those opportunities. We believe that the visual arts specialism of your college has really added to your education and that the college is led well by the principal and the other senior leaders. We have now asked the college to involve faculty leaders more in checking the teaching and learning in their areas, in order to help teachers share what they do well in the classroom. You can help by staying on-task and working hard.

With best wishes

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector