



Bideford College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113516
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289662
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Pauline Robins HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Abbotsham Road
School category	Community		Bideford
Age range of pupils	11–18		EX39 3AR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01237 477611
Number on roll (school)	1671	Fax number	01237 428114
Number on roll (6th form)	246		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Sheila Bloomfield
		Headteacher	Veronica Matthews
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	29–30 November 2006	289662

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bideford College is a significantly larger than average school. It serves the small town of Bideford and the extensive surrounding rural area. The vast majority of its students are of White British heritage. The percentage of students who have learning difficulties or disabilities is slightly above the national average, as is the number of students who have a statement of special educational needs. The college has a hearing support unit with places for nine students.

The college was awarded specialist status for science in September 2004.

A major project to rebuild the college on the existing site is under way.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The college provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. Its own evaluation of its performance is honest and broadly accurate. The construction of the self-evaluation document has been positive in bringing staff and governors together in a collegiate way to reach a common understanding of performance. However, the monitoring processes which support self-evaluation are not consistently effective in leading to action that brings about improvement. Members of the leadership group carry huge areas of responsibility and this limits their ability to monitor rigorously and hold staff to account, especially at a time when a huge building project is getting under way. The school has made progress since the last inspection but this has not always been sustained. Many initiatives are very new and it is not yet possible to see evidence of their full impact. Currently, the capacity of the college to improve further is satisfactory. The college has begun to work effectively with the local authority to bring about improvement and needs to continue to do so to secure further improvement.

The standard reached by students when they enter the college is broadly average. They make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 to reach standards which are above average in English and mathematics and just below average in science. This progress has not been sustained in Key Stage 4 and the percentage of students attaining the higher levels at GCSE is below the national average. However, there are early signs that this weakness is being tackled. Students' progress in the sixth form is also satisfactory but, viewed overall, standards are below average. The quality of teaching is satisfactory, but not yet consistently good enough to overcome the legacy of underachievement. Although there is good practice in the college, in too many lessons teachers' expectations of what the students should achieve are not high enough.

Students say that they enjoy coming to college and this is reflected in their recently improved levels of attendance. The college is working towards the Healthy Schools Award and students are clear about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Behaviour around the college is satisfactory, although some low level disruption takes place in lessons when students are not sufficiently challenged to engage in learning. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and offers some good provision to students who benefit from an alternative approach based on life skills.

Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, achievement at the end of Key Stage 4, and monitoring and evaluation processes are inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to check the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The size of the sixth form has increased in recent years and this reflects the confidence that students have in the college. A wide range of subjects leading to Advanced level

courses is offered but provision for vocational courses is weak. The attainment of students entering the sixth form is lower than average. In 2005, about 9% of students admitted to the sixth form did not complete their courses. Those who do complete make satisfactory progress but overall standards are below average.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Sixth formers speak appreciatively of the opportunities that the school has provided. Many students make a contribution to the school community through, for example, the student leadership team. However, active participation in the context of a community school is not promoted as an expectation for every student. Students are conscious of the relative cultural isolation of their college and value the initiatives they are offered to broaden their outlook. The teaching they receive, while satisfactory, does not continuously provide demanding and fast-moving intellectual rigour to accelerate their progress and foster independent learning. This is limiting the higher standards that more students are capable of attaining. Students value the guidance they receive. They are aware of their target grades and receive feedback on the progress they are making. The review of individual and group progress from assessment data is weak and this is depriving both students and teachers of an important source of information that can challenge them to improve. Some sixth form classes are small but their number is strategically controlled and the school has eliminated a subsidy for sixth form teaching that was previously provided from the main school budget.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase levels of challenge and the amount of active learning in lessons, and plan better to meet pupils' individual needs, especially in Key Stage 4 and among boys.
- Bring a greater level of challenge and robustness to the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure a more consistent approach.
- Target the work of the leadership group on the school's highest priorities to increase its capacity to bring about improvements in standards.
- Focus the college's self-evaluation process on the impact of the actions taken, rather than the provision made.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the college with standards which are broadly average. In the Year 9 national tests, standards have improved recently and are now above average in English and mathematics. They are close to the national average in science. This represents satisfactory progress and achievement.

In Years 10 and 11, standards are below average and students' achievement is inadequate. There is significant underachievement in mathematics, where the good work in Years 7 to 9 has not followed through into Key Stage 4. However, there are clear strategies in place in mathematics to bring about improvement. These are starting to take effect, and mathematics lessons are tightly structured and students are

increasingly aware of what they need to do to achieve the grades that they are aiming for.

Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 but do not achieve as well as they might in Years 10 and 11. Through its own self-evaluation, the college has identified the performance of boys as a concern in all years. The college has begun to address this by offering curriculum provision which appeals specifically to boys and considering alternative ways of teaching which give consideration to their styles of learning. It is too soon to judge the impact of this work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students enjoy attending the college, demonstrate respect for each other and have satisfactory attitudes to learning. Action has been taken to improve behaviour and most students generally behave well. However, there is still some low level disruption within lessons when students are not sufficiently challenged in their learning. Students state that there are inconsistencies in how staff manage students' inappropriate behaviour.

The personal, social, health and citizenship programmes and assemblies encourage the students to explore issues such as democracy and World Aids Week, thus improving their knowledge and understanding of the wider world. However, tutor time is not always used effectively to provide a calm basis for learning at the start of the day. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Students respond well to the encouragement they are given to adopt healthy lifestyles. They know about healthy food choices and many enjoy the healthy options now available at break and lunchtimes. Many students take up the good and varied range of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular sport.

There is an established college council. However, students report that some of the issues they raise are not taken further because of the new building programme. Their views are being sought and their ideas included in the design. Some students are mentors and help younger pupils in college, thereby developing personal qualities that enable them to make an effective contribution to the community.

Attendance has improved and the number of unauthorised absences has dropped. Vigorous monitoring of absences and the good work of the home-college liaison officers, who offer support to both students and families, has proved successful. The college has recently introduced an innovative '126' system which is beginning to reduce repeat fixed term exclusions.

Students report that they feel safe around the college site. They are able to share their concerns about bullying with trusted adults and told inspectors that the staff team deals with incidents quickly and efficiently.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The majority of students behave well in lessons and show a generally positive attitude to their work. Students' relationships with their peers, with teachers and other adults are good.

Although there is good practice in the college, this is not sufficiently widespread to address the legacy of underachievement, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4. In too many lessons, levels of challenge fail to stretch students fully or provide opportunities for them to be active learners rather than passive listeners. In the best lessons, brisk and energetic teaching keeps students interested and involved. In the less successful lessons, the pace is slower and the tasks do not always match individual students' needs. As a result, students lose interest and it is in these lessons that the behaviour of students deteriorates. In most subjects, students are well informed about the levels at which they are working, but are much less sure about what they need to do to improve. Detailed assessment data is available to teachers, but it is not consistently used to guide their planning for students' learning. The quality of marking is inconsistent, within and between departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with a good range of courses for all students in Key Stage 3. Changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum have allowed students to follow different pathways. Different options in Year 11 are effectively designed for individual students within a limited range of vocational courses. Some students attend the local further education college for some of their time. The college works within a consortium of local schools and colleges to enable them to plan and offer a wider variety of courses. New subjects such as archaeology are now offered as a result of the college's specialist science status; these have responded to local needs and student interest.

An alternative curriculum for a specific group of disaffected and lower attaining students is successful in delivering employability and life skills. Students are encouraged to work independently and develop financial skills in the integrated course where they plan an excellent charity event. Gifted and talented students are identified and offered some enrichment activities. The 'Aim Higher' programme is used effectively to raise students' expectations.

All students benefit from enterprise days, industry days, and other business related activities promoted in the college.

A wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities adds effectively to students' experiences. There is good attendance at these, although some after college activities

are limited by transport arrangements for some students. Many subjects include field trips, residential visits and enrichment activities in their schemes of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Good links with the primary schools ensure a smooth transition into Year 7 and students state that they feel settled within a short time of arriving at the college. The home-college liaison officers provide a valued service, which is appreciated by school, students and parents.

Arrangements for the safeguarding of children are satisfactory and meet statutory requirements. There are strong local links with the church youth service and Connexions which are used effectively to support the curriculum and engage those students who are at risk of exclusion.

There are good arrangements in place to help students choose the right courses at GCSE and in the sixth form, and to ensure that they are well prepared for their lives beyond college. Procedures to check students' academic progress have improved recently and are developing. However, there is inconsistency in the way teachers share this information with students. They do not always understand what they are doing well and how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher knows what she wants to achieve and is supported by the acting vice principal and a leadership team who share her vision. Staff and leaders at all levels are positive and have a strong commitment to the college. The college has in place systems to monitor and evaluate students' performance but many of these are at the early stages of implementation and are not yet showing sufficient evidence of raising standards. Information gathered from monitoring is extensive but is too cumbersome to be used effectively in evaluation. In particular, the monitoring of teaching and learning, by senior and middle leaders, is not sufficiently challenging or robust. Too often, it focuses on teaching rather than the progress that students are making. The college has a big agenda for change and this is not yet set out in priority order so that those senior staff responsible for each area can be held rigorously to account.

Senior leaders have a more realistic understanding of the college's performance than middle leaders. The process by which these middle leaders are managed has been formalised and departmental evaluation is beginning to raise standards in some areas. Again, this process is not always consistently or rigorously applied.

Governors are very supportive of the college and can identify the strengths and weaknesses that exist. Structures are in place to hold the college to account. However,

this practice is not refined enough, especially as the demands of the new building programme increase pressure on the capacity of the leadership team. This point is recognised by governors.

Developments resulting from the college's specialist school status have been well managed and have had an impact across all areas of the college. Particularly effective curriculum support is offered to local primary schools and well supported science events involve large numbers of members of the local community visiting the college.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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?	3	3

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?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I recently visited the college with a team of five inspectors. We would like to thank you all for the way you talked to us about the work of the college, and particularly those things that in your opinion are particularly good or which need to be improved. A special thanks to those students who represented you so well in meetings with individual inspectors.

Since the college was inspected last, your behaviour around the site and in lessons has improved. However, there are still some students who do not give their full attention in lessons, particularly when the work set is not challenging enough. Attendance has also improved and the college has good systems in place to keep this on track. The college staff care about students and give you good guidance in choosing your GCSE and sixth form courses. You also appreciate the work that the home-college liaison staff do. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which many of you take advantage of, and opportunities to go on visits and field trips which help you to gain a broader view of life. We have asked the headteacher, governors and college staff to consider four main areas for future development:

- raise the standard of your work, particularly for boys and in Key Stage 4, by increasing the pace of lessons and the demands that teachers make on you
- by monitoring closely, make sure that lessons are interesting and well planned, so that teachers have your full attention and you give maximum effort to your work
- give the college leadership team more opportunity to do their jobs effectively as they carry huge areas of responsibility
- change the way the college monitors its strengths and weaknesses; currently, there is too much concentration on how things are done rather than on whether they are the right things to do.

We wish you every success in the future development of the college.