

Portslade Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114599
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	326045
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Robert Ellis HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2-5 and 11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	978
Sixth form	148
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	34
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to under 3 years	2
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David King
Principal	Mark Whitby
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	20 October 2006
Date of previous childcare inspection	20 October 2006
School address	Chalky Road Portslade Brighton BN41 2WS
Telephone number	01273 416300
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Age group	2–18
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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

Portslade Community College is an average sized secondary school, which has a sixth form and an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) nursery and playgroup. The college also provides adult education classes and some services are available to the local community from early morning until late evening. The sixth form centre is situated about a mile away from the main site. There are more girls than boys in the college and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Most students are White British and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is lower than in most similar schools. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to most schools. Learning difficulties and/or disabilities relate mainly to behaviour and emotional difficulties or specific learning difficulties. The previous headteacher retired in December 2008 and the college is currently being led by an acting executive principal from another local school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in the achievement and standards of students in Years 7 to 11, in the quality of teaching and learning, and the use of assessment information.

The college's overall effectiveness is inadequate. Standards are exceptionally low and students do not make the progress that they should. The proportion of students gaining the equivalent of five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations has improved compared to the previous year but is lower than at the time of the previous inspection. Standards across the range of subjects, and the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, remain well below average and the college did not meet its realistic and challenging targets in 2008. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at the same inadequate rate as others.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students generally mix well and show respect for their environment. Most learners behave appropriately in lessons, although many tend to be passive learners. Behaviour around the college is generally orderly but a small minority of students are sometimes over-boisterous and lack awareness of others. Students' attendance has improved and is now satisfactory.

The quality of teaching and learning, whilst satisfactory overall, is inconsistent across and within subjects and the proportion of teaching and learning that is good or better is insufficient to bring about rapid improvement. Systems are in place to record and monitor the progress that students make but these are not used consistently to identify underperformance or to plan lessons that meet the needs of different groups of students. The range of subjects and courses on offer adequately serves most students. However, the college recognises that more needs to be done to expand the range of alternatives, particularly in the sixth form.

The care, guidance and support provided for students are satisfactory. The new student services team works well and is making a positive impact, for example in improving attendance and reducing the number of exclusions. Guidance on choosing courses and careers is effective, but academic guidance, in the form of teachers' marking, does not always indicate how students can improve their work and reach their targets.

Parents are generally supportive of the college. However, a significant proportion of parents raised concerns about the previous high turnover of staff in some subjects, about some aspects of teaching, students' underperformance and some students' poor behaviour. Inspection evidence mostly supported these views but found behaviour to be generally satisfactory both in lessons and around the college. Most students are very supportive of the college and say that bullying that is reported is dealt with effectively but that low-level disruptive behaviour sometimes has a negative impact on lessons when teaching is weaker.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The new executive headteacher is beginning to build a strong team and has a realistic view of the college's strengths and areas for development. However, monitoring and evaluation are not consistently strong at all levels of management and the college recognises that leadership and management across the college require further development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is providing a satisfactory standard of education. Recruitment and retention of students have increased this year. However, the sixth form is relatively small and this restricts the range of courses that are available. Students say that they like the small classes but given the size of the sixth form, leaders are very aware of the need to develop the curriculum carefully to ensure that it meets students' needs in a cost-effective manner. There is a satisfactory range of academic courses but a more limited choice available for those who wish to choose vocational options or for those who were less successful at GCSE level and do not meet the entry requirements for existing courses.

Students are positive about the sixth form and feel that they are well cared for and that their views and opinions are valued. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers and with each other. The quality of lessons is satisfactory with some good features and this contributes to sixth-form students making satisfactory progress. The college has an inclusive approach; consequently, many students enter the sixth form with below average standards. The standards that they attain at the end of their courses of study are generally below national averages, reflecting satisfactory achievement given their starting points. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and contribute to the college and wider community through a range of voluntary service activities and fund raising for charities. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Self-evaluation is accurate and identifies appropriate areas for further improvement. The college recognises that attendance and punctuality are not good enough and remain appropriate priorities in the sixth form.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. A highly committed supervisor, with an exceptional knowledge of how children learn, leads the pre-school. She heads a strong team of skilled staff and together they show a genuine interest in children and create a stimulating environment where children, whatever their backgrounds or starting points, thrive and develop rapidly in all areas of learning. This view is borne out by parents who are delighted with the high quality of care and encouragement their children receive. One parent, typical of many, wrote 'Thank you for your kindness, patience and endless enthusiasm. You really are a fantastic team and the children's happy faces say more than a thousand words.' Another expressed her gratitude by saying, 'It has been a joy to drop my child off to somewhere he feels so secure and happy.' Within this safe and caring environment, children enjoy a wide range of interesting activities, both indoors and outdoors. Through actively listening to children and consulting their parents, and by conducting regular focused observations and assessments, staff ensure that individual children's

needs and interests are at the heart of the pre-school's planning. Children gain confidence quickly, because staff encourage independence by allowing them to take an active involvement in the setting, for example through agreeing their own rules and choosing activities and resources. From the moment they arrive, until it is time to leave, children are absorbed in activities, under close adult supervision. Parents are warmly welcomed, and the pre-school is very successful at encouraging them to take an active involvement in their children's education, both through contributing to observations and through helping out on a rota system. Care and welfare arrangements meet requirements and the pre-school has successfully addressed all issues arising from the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more lessons are good or better in order to accelerate students' progress in all subjects and raise standards substantially.
- Improve the use of assessment so that tasks and activities are carefully tailored to the needs of different groups; provide students with good quality guidance on how they can improve or develop their work.
- Develop the capacity of leaders at all levels so that monitoring and evaluation lead to accurate self-evaluation which results in effective actions to secure improvement.
- Develop the curriculum so that it meets the needs and aspirations of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The standards that students achieve are not high enough and there is significant underachievement by considerable numbers of students. Students generally enter the college with standards that are slightly below the national average with a smaller proportion of the most able students than in many schools. They make inadequate progress in Years 7 to 9. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9, although improved in English in 2008, remained well below average. GCSE examination results improved slightly in 2008 but continued to be below average. The proportion of students attaining five or more higher grades increased to 41%. However, the proportion attaining five or more higher grades including English and mathematics fell to 29%, which is lower than at the time of the last inspection and well below the national average. There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups, and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same weak progress as their peers.

Overall, standards remain exceptionally low, and students do not make the expected rate of progress. This underachievement reflects the legacy of previous underperformance and, despite some recent improvement, a significant proportion of students are unlikely to achieve their challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students enjoy college and enjoy learning. They are generally eager to participate in lessons and want to make good progress but are frustrated when others disrupt their learning. Parents have raised some concerns about bullying. However, students say that they feel safe in the college and steps to improve the monitoring and reporting of bullying are developing well. Behaviour around the college is satisfactory but there is concern among parents and students about the incidence of verbal abuse, boisterousness and low-level persistent, inappropriate behaviour that sometimes disrupts lessons and detracts from the positive atmosphere in the college. The college has been successful in ensuring students come to college regularly and attendance is now satisfactory. Poor punctuality to some lessons is reducing the effectiveness of teaching and limits learning.

Students understand the issues concerned with living a healthy life. The college offers healthy choices in the canteen but many students choose the less healthy options too often. Students are clear about the dangers of drugs, alcohol and smoking.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students in the college is satisfactory overall. There are, however, limited opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the community. They do not develop an adequate understanding of the wider world, particularly in relation to spiritual and cultural issues.

For some students undertaking vocational courses, workplace skills are developing well. Overall, students do not develop the necessary skills to ensure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Recent improvements in the quality of teaching and students' progress show that teaching is now satisfactory. Most teachers have sound subject knowledge and maintain a good order in the classroom. Teachers set students targets and give them guidance on how to improve; however, this is not always as effective as it might be because the guidance is too general, for example, 'complete coursework' or 'revise carefully'. Where teachers have clear expectations for the lesson and monitor students carefully to ensure they are on track, students make good progress. In these lessons, teachers provide challenging and interesting work and consequently students work with enjoyment and are fully engaged throughout the lesson. In too many other lessons, the pace of learning is too slow and there is a lack of clarity about what students are expected to learn. The use of assessment information to match tasks and activities to students' needs and previous learning is also inconsistent. Often work is not carefully matched to the needs and abilities of the students and therefore they either struggle or are not sufficiently challenged.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of the majority of its pupils. However, too many students leave the college without any qualifications. The college has made some changes to improve the situation, for example, by introducing new courses and changing the structure of the teaching week for Year 10 students. This means that they can spend a whole day studying a subject in depth, which also makes it easier to study courses off the college site. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this initiative but it has been very well received by students. There is still more to do to provide a full range of appropriate courses and pathways for students between the ages of 14 and 19.

The college offers a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. Sports and performing arts are popular with students but the college does not have a system to monitor participation rates across different groups represented in the college. The curriculum offers good opportunities for social and moral development but far less for spiritual and cultural development. There are insufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and to take a more active part in the local and wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students expressed their appreciation of the care they receive in the college and valued the accessibility of student services. Leadership and management of pastoral care are good with an increasing emphasis on students' academic progress. The process of setting targets and tracking systems are in place with most students understanding the level that they are working at and the level they are aiming for.

Systems to monitor and track students' progress are developing but they are not used consistently to identify underachievement and provide appropriate intervention when students are underachieving or at risk of underachieving. Where focused analysis has been undertaken, the college has been able to demonstrate improvements, for example, in improving attendance rates and reducing exclusions.

Books are marked and provide students with some feedback but often comments and short-term targets are not focused enough and do not give enough guidance for students to make the necessary smaller steps in their learning. Teacher assessment in some subjects is accurate and carefully moderated; in other subjects, assessment is less secure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new executive headteacher and his senior team have quickly established a clear agenda for improvement. Recent self-evaluation provides a generally accurate picture of the college's strengths and weaknesses. However, monitoring of teaching and learning has been neither rigorous nor systematic enough to give senior leaders an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses in teaching; consequently, the college has an inaccurate and over-generous picture of the quality of teaching.

The effectiveness of middle leaders is variable, but improving. Middle leaders are now held more accountable for the performance of their areas of responsibility. Many

subject leaders are relatively new to the college and, whilst having made a good start, they have not had sufficient time to make a significant impact in their areas of responsibility. Systems to help middle leaders to evaluate performance and to plan for improvement are at an early stage of development. While the college takes reasonable steps to ensure students' safety, safeguarding documentation does not meet current requirements.

Much is being done to strengthen and develop the governing body. Governors are supportive of the college and they are beginning to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support.

The impact of the actions taken to improve attendance and reduce exclusions, and the recent improvements in student achievement, demonstrate a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	3
The attendance of learners	3	4
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	4	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

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	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise Standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

23 January 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of Portslade Community College, Brighton, BN41 2WS

Thank you for contributing to the inspection of your college and a particular thank you to the students who took time to speak to us and tell us about it. This letter provides a brief summary of our findings but I hope you will take time to read our full report, which is published on the Ofsted website.

The college is not doing as well as it should be. For this reason we have given it a notice to improve and inspectors will come back to check on the progress that has been made.

There are a number of things that are successful at the college.

- The nursery provision at the college is outstanding.
- Most of you attend well and behave appropriately.
- Many of you participate in the range of clubs and activities that are available and you have an understanding of the need to keep fit and healthy.
- Most of you told us that you feel safe, get on well with other students and the adults who work with you, and you know who to turn to if you have a problem.

The things that need to be done to improve the college further are listed below.

- Teaching and learning need to be better so that you make faster progress and reach higher standards.
- Better use needs to be made of assessment information to make sure that you get work that is at the right level for you, and you need good quality advice on how you can improve or develop your work.
- The people who lead and manage the college need to make sure that they have the right information to enable them to decide what are the important things they need to do, and to check if the actions they are taking are making a difference.
- The college needs to provide a wider range of courses that matches your skills and interests.

I am sure that you will want to continue to develop the right attitudes to learning, work hard and play your part in making your college successful.

Yours faithfully

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector