

Comberton Village College

West Street, Comberton, Cambridge, CB23 7DU

Inspection dates

31 January–1 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Comberton Village College is a highly successful school which enables its pupils to achieve not only academic excellence but also to become mature, confident, thoughtful and rounded individuals with clear goals for their future lives.
- Standards of work are high and pupils achieve outstandingly well across the college and in all subjects. Their literacy and numeracy skills are highly developed, as is their ability to think through their ideas to develop their understanding further. These features of learning enable pupils to grasp new ideas and information quickly.
- Teaching is strong across the college and is key to the high-quality performance of pupils. Teachers set high expectations and provide excellent individual support which pupils value and appreciate.
- Excellent relationships between adults and pupils, and amongst pupils themselves, provide the perfect foundation for pupils' exemplary behaviour and attitudes to work. The atmosphere in lessons is very purposeful and pupils learn exceptionally well through discussion and collaboration with one another.
- Pupils are safe in school and feel safe. They
- The relatively new sixth form is outstanding. In a short time, it has become firmly established. Students are now achieving exceptionally well and are on track to attain high standards at the end of their courses.
- The executive principal provides inspirational leadership and sets a very positive tone for the work of the college. The principal has established a strong leadership team and together they are extremely successful in getting the best out of all pupils and staff.
- The success with which the college has achieved significant and major change in recent years without losing sight of its primary goal, that of enabling its pupils to achieve their very best, pays tribute to the academy's capacity to become better still.
- Governors have their finger on the pulse in terms of overseeing the quality of provision, including teaching, and ensuring that outcomes are the best they can possibly be.
- The college's significant partnerships with other institutions, including through its international links, have a highly positive impact on the academy. Its outreach work benefits both itself and the institutions with which it works.

are very well looked after and treat one another with respect.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons and a number of these were jointly seen with members of the senior leadership team including the principal. In addition, the inspection team made shorter visits to lessons to focus on specific aspects such as the level of challenge for different ability groups or provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with three groups of pupils; a group from each key stage.
- Discussions were held with the executive principal, other senior and middle leaders and the Chair of the academy trust. The lead inspector met with a group of three governors, including the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation also took place with the principal of The Voyager Academy, another academy within the same trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 231 responses to the online questionnaire for parents and carers, Parent View, in informing the inspection findings. They also analysed 111 questionnaire returns from staff.
- The inspection team looked closely at a range of documentation, including information on pupils' performance, the school's own analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, improvement plans, safeguarding and behaviour policies, and records and documents relating to the targets set for teachers to improve their work.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bruce Clark	Additional Inspector
Anthony Felsenstein	Additional Inspector
Jacqueline Pentlow	Additional Inspector
Shan Oswald	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The college is much larger than other secondary schools. It has grown rapidly over the last three years, partly to accommodate the new sixth form, now in its second year of operation. A new building was added to house the sixth form.
- The college converted to an academy in February 2011 and is the founder academy for the Comberton Academy Trust. This is the first inspection of the college since it became an academy. When the predecessor school, also called Comberton Village College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The principal of the college is the executive principal for the trust, which currently sponsors one other academy, The Voyager Academy in Peterborough. The college provides outreach support to this academy as well as other schools in the area. It also runs regular training for staff from other schools.
- The college has teaching school status.
- The trust is currently building a brand new academy in Cambourne and the college is involved in getting this major project off the ground.
- The very large majority of pupils are White British but a very small minority are from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. About a third of these pupils speak English as an additional language, though most are fluent English speakers.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average. This is extra government funding given to the school on the basis of the numbers known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority or from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is in line with the national average. The proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Many of these pupils have emotional and behavioural needs. The school has a behavioural support area in school, called The Green Room, which provides specialist support as and when needed and for any pupil in the school who may need time out from mainstream lessons.
- The college manages specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs. Called 'The Cabin', this unit caters for pupils with Aspergers syndrome. The number on roll in the unit is 16, and four of the pupils are in the sixth form.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics.
- The school does not offer alternative provision on another site for its pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To ensure that written feedback to pupils follows the best examples within the school and is always clear and precise so that all pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils begin at the college with attainment that is above national averages. They make strong progress as they move through the school to attain standards that are substantially above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Very high proportions of pupils achieve the highest grades of A and A*.
- Different groups of pupils make equally good progress. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from being taught in small groups. Teaching assistants provide expert help and this assists these pupils to make outstanding progress in their learning.
- Pupils on roll in The Cabin have a timetable that is tailored very closely to their needs and hence spend varying amounts of time in mainstream classes depending on how ready they are to work in different subjects. Support staff monitor very carefully how well pupils are getting on and increase or decrease the time in The Cabin accordingly. Consequently, pupils with Aspergers achieve extremely well both in the main school and in the sixth form.
- The small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others. Most are fluent in English and those who are new to the language learn English fast in the college's very positive learning climate.
- Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and receiving extra support through the pupil premium are performing outstandingly well and better than similar pupils nationally. The gap between these pupils' attainment and that of others in the college is rapidly closing as a result of careful use of the pupil premium funds. For example, these funds are used to provide one-to-one tuition and organise additional groups in key subjects such as mathematics and English.
- Students' performance in the college's first AS level examinations in 2012 was notably good in most subjects. However, it was not consistently so in all. The school has acted swiftly and successfully to address this. As a result, pupils in the sixth form are now making exceptionally good strides in their learning. In both the upper and lower sixth, progress is strong as a result of excellent teaching. Pupils are, therefore, on track to achieve high standards in forthcoming examinations.
- Excellent literacy and numeracy skills ensure that pupils cope with work across different subjects remarkably well. One of the distinctive features of the college is the extent to which pupils are able to work things out for themselves.
- In many lessons, pupils share and discuss ideas and learn through listening to one another. If one is stuck on a problem or does not quite understand a particular idea, others explain it quickly and effectively. This leads to an environment that is highly conducive to learning. In one Year 11 mathematics lesson, for example, involving pupils of lower ability, one pupil shared his lack of confidence in handling fractions. Others in the group immediately gave advice on how he could improve his technique and approach to problems involving fractions.
- Relatively few pupils are entered early for GCSE examinations. Those that do are successful in attaining high grades.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers' consistently high expectations of all pupils across the school make a significant contribution to their learning and progress. Pupils' thinking is routinely extended through the high-quality activities they are given and the use of very effective questioning.
- The classrooms are busy places where pupils are actively engaged in learning. Adults and pupils work together in a very purposeful and highly effective way.
- Lessons are well organised and planning is thorough so that work is set at just the right level for pupils' abilities and current levels of attainment.
- Teaching for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is exceptionally skilled. Staff working in The Cabin, including support staff, have very high levels of expertise and knowledge on how to support those with Aspergers and this means that they use methods and resources that work extremely well for these pupils.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to enable students to understand key subject ideas in the level of depth that will enable them to achieve the higher grades.
- Pupils have frequent opportunities to use their literacy skills across different subjects. Books show an extensive range and variety of work, as well as a significant volume of work completed by pupils. This indicates how hard teachers and pupils work.
- Teachers question pupils with considerable skill, especially in the sixth form, to help them to deepen their understanding and to extend their thinking and own ideas. Questioning of pupils while they are working enables teachers to gain considerable feedback from individual pupils as to how well they are getting on. Teachers use this to ensure that key learning points are grasped by all. Pupils also readily ask questions of their teachers, showing a strong interest in their work.
- Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and they do so with considerable benefits to their own and other's learning. Teachers know their pupils extremely well and use this knowledge to make learning relevant and interesting for them.
- Teachers provide pupils with regular feedback, both in lessons and through written comments on their work. There is much high-quality marking but, occasionally, written guidance is less evident and some pupils are unsure about how to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils take great pride in their college. They have highly positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do their best in class. Behaviour in and out of lessons is exceptionally good. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that their children are safe and happy at school and are well looked after.
 - The most distinctive feature about pupils' behaviour is that this is self-regulated rather than imposed on pupils. Their own expectations of what good behaviour means are very high and they work hard to live up to these.
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- Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds get on well together and benefit from the range of diverse backgrounds reflected in the school intake. There are high levels of mutual respect and appreciation of difference. Pupils also value the work that staff do to support them to achieve the best they can.
- It is clear that pupils enjoy school and enjoy learning in lessons. They relish the challenges presented by teachers in the work they set. The above-average attendance rates reflect pupils' liking for school. Participation in out-of-school activities is very high and the college ensures that no-one misses out by providing extra funding for those who might need it.
- The school has clear policies on behaviour, including unsafe behaviour. Harassment and bullying are not tolerated and are rare. Pupils are confident that the school deals with any issues of misbehaviour, including bullying, effectively. They are very familiar with the systems for rewards and sanctions.
- The Green Room is used judiciously and highly skilled support staff help pupils to think about their behaviour and how to modify it. Behaviour records show that the relatively low numbers of fixed-term exclusions are declining as a result of the success of The Green Room. This is also having a positive impact on improving achievement even further for pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.
- Pupil premium funds are used to enable targeted pupils to participate in leadership programmes and schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which help them to develop confidence and raise self-esteem. Younger pupils attend an adventure club which helps them to become more self-assured.
- Pupils are taught about safety exceptionally well through the personal development days, including how to stay safe when using the internet. They also learn about what bullying is and how to deal with it.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The strong college philosophy of pupils being at the centre of all that it does is a key cornerstone of its considerable success. Staff have a very clear sense of direction and there is uncompromising ambition to be even better.
 - The work of the college is monitored extremely well, with very quick action taken to improve any areas that are not performing to the high standards set. Pupils' progress is checked with rigour and a wide range of ways provided to support any individual whose progress shows even the slightest sign of slipping. This ensures that excellent attention is given to promoting equality of opportunity so that progress of all groups is equally outstanding.
 - The academy's work in training its own staff and those from other schools is exceptional. Staff benefit from an extensive range of opportunities to improve their work. Middle and aspiring leaders have exceptional support to develop their skills in leadership and management. Hence they make a significant contribution to the work of the school and in helping to continue to drive up standards even further.
 - A very wide range of courses are offered at every key stage including the sixth form. These are supplemented by a vast range of opportunities for pupils' personal and spiritual, moral, social
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and cultural development. Consequently, pupils leave the college as very well-rounded young people ready for their next stage in life. It is rare for any pupil to leave without having something tangible to move onto.

- Provision such as The Cabin and The Green Room are exceptionally well led and managed. A very careful eye is maintained on the impact of support and the high-quality and specific training that staff receive ensure that they are very up to date in the practices they employ.
 - The principal of The Voyager Academy is fulsome in her praise of the support she and her staff have received from Comberton and its effectiveness in enabling her school to develop and grow.
 - The board of trustees, led by the Chair, provide an exceptionally good strategic steer to the future development of the college. Trustees also support the college through their recruitment of senior staff and ensuring strong governance.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a strong grasp of how well the school is doing and where there is even the smallest room for further improvement. They follow closely the progress of pupils supported through the pupil premium funds to ensure that the gap in attainment between pupils eligible for free school meals and others within the school closes. This ensures that the funding is used in the best way possible. Indeed, the college adds to these funds to ensure that no group gets left behind. Equal rigour is applied to checking how well teaching is going and in ensuring that there is a strong link between teacher performance and pay. Governors challenge college leaders with great skill and take a key role in driving the agendas for meetings to enable them to monitor the school's work effectively. They ensure that statutory requirements are met, including those relating to safeguarding.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136463
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	400220

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1793
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	311
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Elliot
Headteacher	Stephen Munday
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01223 262503
Fax number	01223 264116
Email address	thecollege@comberton.cambs.sch.uk

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