

Southam College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125738
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	359931
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Mary Davis

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lindsey Dennish
Headteacher	Ranjit Samra
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2008
School address	Welsh Road West Southam CV47 0JW
Telephone number	01926 812560
Fax number	01926 815807
Email address	southamcollege@aol.com

Age group	11–18
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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 52 lessons and 50 teachers, held meetings with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies and development planning; data related to the tracking of students' progress; senior leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning; safeguarding documents; minutes of the governing body meetings; students' work and 350 questionnaires from parents and carers, together with those from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What assessment information and lesson observations reveal about the learning and progress of students in current classes and how well they are developing independent learning skills.
- How consistently assessment is used to support learning and how well students understand how to reach their targets.
- The impact that specialist college status is having across the school and the wider community.
- How well the school promotes community cohesion and what impact this is having on students' understanding of life in a multicultural society.

Information about the school

Southam College is a larger than average secondary school, serving a wide rural area. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below the national average. The school is a specialist college for technology, humanities and applied learning. It has Healthy Schools status.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2009 and has a newly established leadership team.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Southam College is an outstanding school. The new leadership team has worked tirelessly to ensure school improvement and to sustain the high levels of attainment achieved by students. The school's ethos, of raising aspirations and instilling confidence, results in students being keen to do well and to achieve their challenging targets. They are supported in this by the outstanding care and guidance they receive. One student commented, 'Teachers are genuinely interested in you as a person' and this typifies the student/teacher relationships observed by inspectors.

Students are proud of their school and are welcoming and polite to visitors. They behave well and older students are keen to support younger ones, for example, through the very successful peer mentoring scheme. This not only enables students to develop leadership skills, but also promotes a strong sense of school community. Attendance rates are consistently high, as students enjoy coming to school and also enjoy the range of subjects and enrichment activities they are offered. These include the wide variety of sporting activities from rugby and basketball to boxing and equestrian competitions. Students' adoption of healthy lifestyles is shown in their high rates of participation in physical activities, together with their excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Students say that they feel exceptionally safe and well cared for, that their form tutors and year heads know them well and that there is always someone who will support them and listen to them. Their spiritual, social and moral development is strong and the 'no put-down zone' strongly supports tolerance and respect for others. However, students' understanding of different ways of life in the United Kingdom and their first-hand experience of schools in other contexts is less well developed.

Although the large majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good or outstanding, particularly in the sixth form; it was less consistent in Key Stage 4. Most teachers provide a variety of active and exciting tasks during lessons that promote a fast pace of learning. An element of competition is evident in many lessons and promotes enjoyment and engagement, particularly that of boys. The school's technology specialism is evident throughout the school as teachers use new technology well to enhance and enrich learning by, for example, providing a musical sound track to promote excitement or to underline a visual image. In a few lessons, teachers do not use assessment information to plan lessons that sufficiently meet the needs of different abilities within their class and, as a result, students have to wait for others to finish or are moved on before they have time to complete a task. In a few lessons, teachers fail to evaluate students' learning sufficiently to be able to

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support or challenge effectively. Although some marking is outstanding, the quality of marking overall is inconsistent, so that students do not always have sufficient feedback on their work or advice on how to improve, although they all know their targets and their current level or grade. The outstanding curriculum effectively meets the individual needs of students and this is a key factor in their outstanding achievement. For example, early entry in core subjects is enabling students to achieve success and improve on their grades, and separate English groups for boys and girls enable teachers to focus on the differing interests of these groups. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's range of specialist subjects that have enabled a wide variety of enrichment including foreign visits and have contributed to the outstanding student outcomes. The pastoral team provides a strong integrated service, monitoring behaviour, attendance and students' attitudes. The well-established lines of communication ensure the full involvement of teachers, students and parents. The care of those for whom circumstances make them vulnerable is particularly effective, including the care and support for those students who are educated off-site. Teaching assistants contribute very well to this provision and also provide well-organised and effective support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in lessons, enabling them to learn as well as their peers.

The school has an outstanding capacity to develop further. The new headteacher is passionate about the school's development. Together with his strong team of senior leaders, and with the outstanding support of the governing body, he has rigorously and successfully identified and tackled areas of weakness. This has resulted in considerable improvement in many areas of the school's work since the last inspection, particularly in student outcomes and in provision. New leadership of the sixth form is also making excellent improvements in key areas. Although these improvements have yet to make a full impact on provision for students, there is an improving trend in outcomes, which are now above average

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share existing outstanding practice to ensure that all teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - evaluate the learning taking place in all lessons, so that teachers consistently challenge students
 - ensuring that marking informs students how they can improve their work
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan learning activities to meet the different needs of individuals within their classes.
- Develop students' understanding of different ways of life in the United Kingdom by forging links with schools in other contexts

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Students join the school with broadly average attainment in English and mathematics, although the proportion of higher attainers is above average. Over the

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last three years, by the end of Key Stage 4, students have reached levels of attainment that are significantly above national levels, particularly in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students who gain five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics is also consistently significantly above average. Learning and progress seen in class were good and often outstanding, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Students are interested in their lessons and show enthusiasm for the tasks set. They particularly show enjoyment when provided with activities that enable them to move around the classroom or to work in groups when they are able to develop teamwork and are keen to support each other in these activities. Students are confident when explaining their work to each other and to adults and value opportunities to assess each other’s work by making positive comments on how to improve. In many lessons, there is a sense of partnership as teachers and students share responsibility for progress towards the lesson objectives and there is a strong focus on developing independent learning skills. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the very few students who speak English as an additional language or who are of minority ethnic heritage, make equally good progress.

Students have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe, in particular when using the internet. They say this is constantly being reinforced in lessons and assemblies. They feel that they have a voice within the school and their opinions are sought on a variety of issues by school leaders, including in the appointment of new teachers. The school council is being given the opportunity to contribute ideas and designs for the new entrance to the school. Most students behave well and in some lessons, behaviour is outstanding. Students value teachers’ consistent approach to the management of behaviour and peer mentors demonstrate the ability to pass on their high expectations about acceptable standards of behaviour. The very few students who fall short of these expectations are well managed so that they do not disrupt the learning of the majority. Students enjoy taking a key role in the local community, including working with feeder primary schools and initiating charity fund-raising. Their high attendance, level of skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, together with their confident inter-personal skills and the excellent understanding across the school of vocational pathways as a result of the school’s specialism in this area, provide outstanding preparation for their next steps into the school’s sixth form, further education or employment.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
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

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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The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Good subject knowledge enables teachers to communicate their enthusiasm for their subject. As one student commented, 'The way they teach makes you want to learn more.' Lessons are well planned and structured to offer a variety of learning activities. For example, in a science lesson, students enjoyed working against the clock to look at a diagram of the heart, and then draw and label it from memory. Lesson objectives are clearly defined and are often linked directly to success criteria so that students understand from the outset how they can make progress. In a few lessons, however, explanations are unclear or opportunities are missed for teachers to model the task to students and this can result in a slow start to the lesson. Resources are well prepared and teaching assistants deployed effectively in the classroom to support learning. Most teachers use assessment well to support learning, by using questioning to probe the level of understanding. A few teachers do not back up opportunities for students to assess their own progress against the learning objectives sufficiently by expecting them to feed back in detail about their level of understanding. Assessment in some subjects, such as art, history and design and technology are models of good practice. Here, students are given a clear understanding of where they are and what they need to do to improve so that they can see their progress over time as their course progresses.

The curriculum goes well beyond statutory requirements including the opportunity to study two foreign languages and drama in Key Stage 3, and GCSE photography and diploma courses in engineering and creative media in Key Stage 4, reflecting the school's specialist subjects.. Targeted literacy support in Key Stages 3 and 4 enables the low attainers to achieve well. Enrichment at both key stages is extensive and has a major influence on the enjoyment of school for a very high proportion of pupils and also broadens their outlook. In addition to the sporting activities and foreign residential experience, community involvement enables students to work for the benefit of others. Learning pathways offer a wide range of personalisation and the development of these for both low and high attainers is on-going and dynamic.

Transition arrangements are strong and students contribute a great deal by mentoring and supporting new students to the school. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive specialist support as they move from

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Key Stage 2 and have many opportunities to visit the school prior to entry. Peer mentors help with advice as students choose their options. The ‘exam breakfast’ is a positive measure in providing reassurance and a good meal before students sit examinations. The school can point to a wealth of case studies of students who have been supported, enabled to be fully included and able to access their education and achieve success. The pastoral team has been particularly successful in promoting attendance and reducing the numbers of persistent absentees by supporting students and their families.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

As a result of the exceptional commitment and drive of the headteacher, which directly inspires senior and other managers, all staff and students buy into the school ethos of raising aspirations and expectations. Sophisticated tracking of students’ progress enables leaders to identify and address any underachievement and to set challenging targets for all students. Specific groups are targeted to enable them to achieve their goals, for example by teaching boys and girls separately in some English classes. The school has many strategies to sustain the morale of its staff and a high level of care for all is evident. Expectations of competency are very high, but senior leaders show belief that staff can succeed in the same way they promote the optimum achievement of all students. Thorough self-evaluation across the school results in rigorous development planning and the impact of actions is closely monitored and evaluated. This closely involves middle leaders including those of the specialist subjects and pastoral leaders, so that all can drive forward the school’s development. Ensuring equal opportunities is given high priority in this evaluation and there is extensive scrutiny of all relevant data to identify patterns of performance or participation.

The governing body is well informed, highly effective in supporting and challenging senior leaders, and has wide ranging expertise which is deployed effectively. Safeguarding practice is robust: child protection arrangements are well coordinated and appropriate training and policies are in place. Partnership with other schools and institutions, especially through the specialist college subjects, is used creatively to improve provision, for example in the diploma courses, and external agencies are used well to support students’ well-being. The school engages parents and carers well, including through use of a variety of media to communicate with them; it is working to increase their understanding of how they can support their children’s

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learning. Although the school has a strong sense of community and works hard to involve the local area in the life of the school, national links are less well developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students enter the sixth form with a good profile of passes at GCSE. Lesson observations consistently show students making at least good progress with some groups making outstanding progress and this is resulting in a pattern of improving results at A and AS level that were above average in 2010. Students' independent learning is good and they make a strong contribution to the life of the school and community. The quality of teaching is consistently at least good and sometimes better and is well supported by assessment that informs students how they can develop their work. The curriculum provided effectively matches the needs and interests of the students and a wide variety of subjects are offered. Learning is enriched well by, for example, an artist in residence who provides both support and inspiration for A level artists. Although support and pastoral care are judged to be good, a few parents and carers voiced concern about the lack of guidance students receive for their university application. However, all students successfully progressed to higher education or employment at the end of the last academic year. The new leadership in the sixth form has made excellent improvements in tracking progress and in curriculum adjustments and is beginning to develop the curriculum provision but the impact of these new developments on raising achievement has yet to fully embed. Overall effectiveness is good and the school is demonstrating improving trends in outcomes and provision.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming response of the small minority of parents and carers who completed questionnaire was positive, with most saying that the school keeps their children safe and that their children enjoy school. A few feel that they are not sufficiently involved in their children's learning and that the school does not listen to their concerns or suggestions. Inspectors found that the school is improving methods of communication and striving to involve parents and carers more closely in its work. A small minority feel that the school does not help their children to have a healthy lifestyle, while inspectors found the reverse to be true and judged this to be outstanding. Some parents and carers express concern about the staffing in mathematics saying that their children have experienced several different teachers since the start of the year. Inspectors explored this and found that this was due to staff leaving and that the school is giving priority to ensuring continuity of staffing for examination classes. The school has been asked to clarify the position to parent and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Southam 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 350 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1252 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	107	31	222	63	14	4	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	102	29	234	67	11	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	76	22	240	69	29	8	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	99	28	211	60	29	8	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	74	21	226	65	23	7	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	16	224	64	49	14	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	17	202	58	72	21	3	1
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)	66	19	223	64	36	10	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	88	25	213	61	34	10	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	89	25	207	59	29	8	8	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	56	16	202	58	49	14	7	2
The school is led and managed effectively	107	31	206	59	17	5	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	126	36	195	56	22	6	1	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	36	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



20 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Southam College, Southam, CV47 0JW

Thank you for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We were particularly impressed by your evident pride in your school and by the way older students support others through peer mentoring.

You go to an outstanding school. Your attainment by the end of Year 11 is consistently high and 2010 results in English, mathematics and science were well above the national average. Attainment in the sixth form is improving and in 2010 was above the national average. The school provides you with an exciting curriculum that is closely matched to your individual needs. The enrichment activities, particularly the wide variety of sporting opportunities help you to stay healthy. You are keen to do well and to continue to improve. Your attendance is excellent. The good teaching you receive enables you to learn well and in some lessons you make outstanding progress because of the variety of fun activities provided for you. Teachers enable you to develop independence, teamwork and leadership skills and the confidence you need to prepare you for your future. We have asked them to ensure that they all plan lessons that closely match your ability and to ensure that they assess your work effectively so that they can support and challenge you appropriately. We have also asked that the marking of your work is always as good as that you receive in art, design and technology and history. The outstanding care, guidance and support that you receive enable you all to feel safe. You told us that you value the fact that you are well-known as individuals and we agree.

The leaders of the school work hard to make sure you continue to be safe and well cared for and that you develop well as young people. We have asked them to make sure that they provide opportunities for you to have first-hand experience of schools outside your local area, so that you have a better understanding of your place in our national community. You can help them by continuing to work hard and asking your teachers to explain how you can improve. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mary Davis
Lead inspector

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