

Robertsbridge Community College

Knelle Road, Robertsbridge, East Sussex, TN32 5E

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From their starting points, students make good and often very good progress so that they achieve well in their GCSEs, and exceptionally well in mathematics.
- The school is a close-knit, friendly community, in which everyone shares its values of respect and responsibility. Students are very proud of the school.
- Teaching is at least good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers make lessons interesting and enjoyable.
- Students who need extra help to catch up are given effective support. As a result, gaps in attainment between different groups of students are closing. Almost all groups achieve well.
- The leadership team has worked, successfully in most subjects, to raise standards by improving the quality of teaching and learning. It has a good knowledge of students' starting points and the progress they make. Achievement is improving as a result, and students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Students behave very well, enjoy school and feel safe. They say that bullying is rare but know exactly what to do if it should occur. Their attendance is good and they are keen to learn.
- The newly reconstituted board of governors has a clear oversight of the school's work, and an accurate understanding of how well it is doing and what needs improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in a few subject areas, including geography and languages, is not as strong as that in other subjects.
- Written advice from some teachers is not as good as it could be, so students do not always know what to do to improve.
- Teachers do not always make sure that students respond to their marking.
- Teachers do not always use their marking and assessment to plan lessons that enable all students to make the best progress possible.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons, some with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors attended tutor group sessions and an assembly.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, heads of departments, staff, several groups of students, representatives from the school council, the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including school policies, data on standards and progress, safeguarding and lesson observations, improvement plans, anonymised performance management records and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Inspectors took into account the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Heather Leatt	Lead Inspector
Madeleine Gérard	Additional Inspector
Thomas Gibson	Additional Inspector
Andrew Lyons	Additional Inspector
Genevieve Usher	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Robertsbridge Community College is smaller than the average secondary school.
- The school has specialisms in mathematics and computing.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children from service families, is also below average.
- 13 students are eligible for catch-up funding, which is for Year 7 students who did not attain Level 4 in English at the end of primary school.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs and receive support through school action is higher than average. The proportion of disabled students and those on the school action plus programme, or with a statement of special educational needs, is average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are well below national averages.
- A very small number of Key Stage 4 pupils receive part of their education off-site through various providers, including South Coast College Hastings, Plumpton College, Bexhill Skills Centre and Bexhill College.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement, particularly in underperforming subjects, further by ensuring that:
 - assessment, and marking, especially of spelling, punctuation and grammar, are thorough in every subject
 - all students are given clear written guidance on how to improve their work and always take note and respond to the comments they receive
 - all teachers use information from marking and assessment to plan work that is always well matched to individual students' needs, particularly for those who learn most quickly and those with special educational needs.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The majority of students join the school with attainment that is average and then make good, and often very good, progress throughout the school in many subjects. They make exceptional progress in mathematics.
- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics was in line with the national average, despite decreasing in 2012. Preliminary data indicate that these results, particularly in English, where there was an unusual drop in 2012, will rise in 2013. This is as a result of the school's successful approach to tackling underperformance in teaching, and in tracking and monitoring students' progress and raising achievement.
- Students supported by the pupil premium, including those in local authority care, make good progress. Students' average point scores show that in 2012, there was a gap between the lower achievement in English and mathematics of those eligible for the funding and those who were not, but the gap was no greater than that seen nationally between these groups. School data and observations by inspectors indicate that the gap will close in 2013, as a result of a range of interventions, funded by the premium, put in place to raise achievement.
- Data show that nearly 80% of the students in receipt of the Year 7 catch-up premium are making expected or better than expected progress in English. The money has been spent well on enabling students to make progress in literacy, particularly reading, with intervention continuing in Year 8 for those who need it.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress overall, although progress is better at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. However, they still achieve in line with similar groups of students nationally in English and mathematics. Data for 2013 indicate that this group is on track to achieve well in the summer examinations.
- Some students are entered early for GCSEs in mathematics and geography in Year 10. This is done to support good achievement and any student who does not reach the expected grade is given another opportunity to take the examination. This is a successful strategy for mathematics, where achievement is outstanding. The school has decided to stop early entry in geography, as it is not enabling students to achieve as well as possible.
- The progress of the very small number of students attending courses off-site is tracked and monitored carefully and they continue to attend classes in English and mathematics. As a result, this group also achieves very well. In 2012, all students who left the school either had a place in further education or training, or had found employment.

The quality of teaching

is good

- In all years, most of the teaching is rarely less than good and some is outstanding. Many teachers have high expectations of all students and challenge them to achieve and progress well.
- In most lessons, students respond enthusiastically and are keen to do well and progress, working with enjoyment and purpose. In the best lessons, teachers have a very good knowledge of their students' attainment and progress and use this information effectively to challenge all groups. This was a feature of an outstanding Year 8 music lesson, where two thirds of the class had special educational needs and the teacher used a range of inspirational strategies and targeted questions to enable all students to learn exceptionally well. In a Year 9 science lesson, students worked in groups with interest and application to research and prepare a presentation on the benefits of polymers in everyday life.
- Students in both key stages say that teaching in English and mathematics is good, and inspectors agree. Progress in mathematics is outstanding, due to teachers' applying their good subject knowledge to plan and teach lessons that challenge all students to make the best progress possible. The head of English, appointed in September, has introduced changes to

teaching, assessment and the tracking and monitoring of students' progress, and current data show that these have had a significant impact on raising standards.

- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not have high enough expectations of all students and their planning is not well enough matched to students' needs to help them all to achieve well over time.
- The quality of marking varies within and between departments. In many cases, work is marked regularly and provides useful feedback to which students are required to respond, for example in mathematics. Where work is not marked as thoroughly, students do not receive feedback on what they need to do to improve and errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not pointed out.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium have access to a range of targeted support, including additional tuition, enabling them to make similar progress to that of their classmates.
- An overwhelming majority of parents responding to the on-line questionnaire said that teaching was good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is very good. They are polite, courteous and respectful towards adults and each other. They value the community ethos of the school and are proud of its friendly and caring atmosphere. They cooperate well with staff and one another, and enjoy working in teams or groups.
- Students say they feel safe and happy and that staff care for them, teach them well and want the best for them. They value the range of opportunities and activities that the school provides. Students on the school council particularly appreciate being able to make a contribution to a number of aspects of school life, for example helping to rewrite the school's anti-bullying policy and purchasing several picnic benches for the main recreational area.
- The school has worked hard to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence. As a result, attendance is improving and is in line with national averages.
- Exclusion rates have fallen over the last three years for all groups. However, despite this good improvement, there is still a predominance of excluded students with special educational needs, which the school acknowledges and recognises needs to be reduced if behaviour and safety are to be improved overall.
- Students report that teachers give them very good advice about how to stay safe. They are knowledgeable about how to use modern technology safely and have a clear understanding of the dangers of cyber-bullying. Year 9 students spoke positively about a police talk they received regarding safe use of the internet. In tutor time and in lessons, students are informed of the benefits of pursuing healthy lifestyles and learn of the dangers and adverse effects of drugs and substance abuse.
- Students also have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying. They say that bullying is rare, but when incidents do occur, teachers deal with them quickly and effectively. They know whom to go to for help should they need it.
- Most parents and staff agree that the school manages behaviour well and that students are kept safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, with the support of his senior leadership team, has worked hard over the past three years to improve standards, challenging both underperformance in teaching and underachievement. There is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and the headteacher's vision and high expectations are shared by most middle leaders and teachers.
- The school provides a traditional curriculum which meets the needs and interests of its students

and gives them all equal opportunities to succeed. When the school enters students early for examinations, this does not impact negatively on their performance, and is notably successful in mathematics. Alternative provision, for the small number of students who access it, is chosen carefully to meet their needs and they achieve extremely well. The school takes reasonable steps to ensure their behaviour and safety when attending off-site.

- The school's checks on how well it is doing are accurate. Senior staff and governors are very well aware of what the strengths and weaknesses are. Improvement planning is of a good quality and leaders set targets that are both challenging and ambitious. However, the impact of strategies and initiatives on outcomes is not always as clearly evaluated as it needs to be to inform next steps for the school's improvement.
 - The school has a clear performance management system, which is linked to salary progression. All teachers are set a target related to improving teaching and learning, and professional development is put in place to support this. There has not been a really thorough evaluation of the impact of this development on improving teaching and raising students' achievement, however.
 - The development of students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual needs is embedded in teaching and learning and is at the heart of the school's vision and ethos. Wall displays in corridors, the library and canteen actively promote anti-discrimination and tolerance of, and respect for, other cultures and religions. Both in formal meetings and in informal conversations that occurred during the inspection, students were polite, mature and genuinely interested in aspects of the inspection process and the world outside school.
 - The school uses the pupil premium funding in a range of ways to meet students' individual needs and raise attainment. The impact of this is clear at both key stages, where gaps are narrowing. In Year 11, school data show that the proportion of students in receipt of free school meals who are making three or more levels of progress in English has increased from 45% in 2012 to 80% in 2013.
 - The school works very well with parents, the majority of whom agree that the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress and that it is well led and managed. The great majority of those who responded to the on-line questionnaire would recommend the school.
 - The local authority has provided the school with light touch support over the past three years and considers the leadership and management of the school to be good. It acknowledges that the school is known to support looked-after children very well, and has consequently placed a number of children into the school as part of its 'virtual school' arrangement.
 - The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has recently been reconstituted to strengthen its expertise and confidence in challenging the school to improve further. It is now effective and well equipped to carry out its statutory duties and hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account for all aspects of the school's performance.
 - Governors are aware that several teachers have not moved up the pay scale in the past year as they have not met the rigorous targets set for them. Governors are fully aware of where weaknesses exist, for example in teaching, as well as the steps being taken by the headteacher to tackle these. They also have an excellent awareness of the school, its performance in relation to that of similar schools and in comparison with the national picture; they are monitoring this year's performance in English GCSE closely.
 - Governors have an in-depth knowledge of the way in which the school has spent the pupil premium funding and the rationale for doing so, but they have yet to evaluate its impact in raising standards and narrowing the gap.
 - A comprehensive training programme is now in place to meet the governing body's needs.
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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	114588
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	412772

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Fitzgerald
Headteacher	Simon Potten
Date of previous school inspection	30 September–1 October 2009
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