

Icknield Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123244
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	359403
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Christine Raeside HMI

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	638
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Cockrem
Headteacher	Mr Richard Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 June 2008
School address	Love Lane Watlington OX49 5RB
Telephone number	01491 612691
Fax number	01491 612951
Email address	headteacher.4082@ocnmail.net

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 35 lessons taught by 32 teachers, four of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked closely at its analysis of student progress and attainment. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body, staff and a local authority adviser. Inspectors also scrutinised the school development plan, policies, a report from the School Improvement Partner and records of school improvement work. They considered responses to questionnaires by 85 parents and carers, 93 students and 34 staff.

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

- The effectiveness and sustainability of strategies to raise attainment and improve rates of progress for all students.
- The effectiveness of leaders at all levels in driving improvement in teaching, learning and students' outcomes.
- The impact of strategies to reduce variation in subject performance.

Information about the school

Icknield Community College is a smaller than average sized, mixed comprehensive school, serving a rural community in Oxfordshire. The very large majority of students are White British, with very few from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is about half the national average. The proportion identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, although slightly fewer than average have a statement of special educational needs. The school has held specialist status in humanities since September 2005, with English, drama and geography as lead subjects.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Icknield Community College provides a good standard of education in a close and caring community. Students say that they feel extremely safe at school and most parents and carers agree that the school keeps them safe. Relationships between staff and students are warm. There is a shared focus on good achievement and high expectations. One boy summed this up well, saying that his grade A target was challenging, but 'I feel that I can do it because my teacher has so much faith in me and that gives me confidence.'

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to students is a strength of the school. One parent mentioned the 'excellent transition arrangements from primary to secondary school.' Another, whose child transferred to Icknield and has special needs, said, 'I know this school will do all they can to help.' Other comments echoed the positive aspects of being in a small, caring environment where students are known as individuals. Students spoke of how well the school helps them deal with particular challenges, for example making special arrangements to help them settle back in and catch up after long illnesses.

The school's humanities specialism has a positive impact on learning. Strong leadership and management of teaching, including through the specialism, has helped to develop a cohesive and focused approach to school improvement amongst middle leaders. Leaders of the main specialist subjects have provided effective support to subject areas where performance has been more variable, such as in history, where results improved notably in 2010. New leadership and similarly effective partnership work is also strengthening modern foreign languages, where achievement has been too weak in recent years.

Students learn effectively because of predominantly good teaching. This is particularly the case in the core subjects of English and mathematics, where progress is consistently at or above expectations. Attainment is broadly average, despite consistent results in these core subjects, because there have at times been variable outcomes in other areas. Assessment data is systematically collected and used well to track and monitor achievement. The majority of teachers use information resulting from this process to plan their lessons so that all students are enabled to succeed. In the best lessons, assessment is an integral feature of learning, with questioning and feedback carefully targeted to maximise progress for every individual. Learning is lively and everyone is challenged to participate. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, however, it is often because activities are not sufficiently well tailored to

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meet individual needs or because marking and other feedback are not sufficiently well focused on how to improve. Sometimes learning is too teacher-directed, limiting independence.

The school is at a significant phase in its development, with a new headteacher arriving in September 2011. The governing body, along with the current headteacher, who is moving on to lead an International School, have pursued a thorough process of consultation and preparation to ensure a smooth handover. Collaboration on the next set of school improvement priorities has been effective, based on a sharp and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development, ably supported by local authority partners. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is therefore good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment by ensuring that progress for all groups of students and in all subject areas is consistently good or outstanding and matches the standard of the best in the school.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to tailor activities to meet the needs of all groups of students
 - raising the quality of verbal and written feedback to students so that they are consistently well informed about how they are doing and how to improve their work
 - raising the level of challenge and participation in lessons so that all students engage actively in their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students are enthusiastic about their learning and keen to do well. They achieve most when lessons are planned to promote independence and challenge them to think for themselves. Students in a music lesson worked hard to develop their own ensemble renditions of a well-known song. They actively encouraged and taught one another to develop their use of rhythm and to play with accuracy and feeling. Very good progress and a high level of enjoyment were tangible.

Students make good progress from broadly average starting points. Attainment at GCSE has remained average overall, due to variance in the performance of a few subjects, or to some inconsistency in achievement between groups. Gains in progress for more-able students in 2010, for example, were offset by girls' progress lagging behind boys'. Current tracking and assessment analyses show this to be an improving picture but the school has rightly made eradication of such variation an ongoing priority. Current tracking of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities indicates that they are making satisfactory progress. However, programmes targeted to eradicate weaknesses in reading are having a positive impact; reading ages for targeted students, and therefore access to the wider

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curriculum, are increasing. In an English lesson, explicit teaching of relevant phrases gave confidence to Year 8 boys learning how to adapt their speaking and listening skills to a more formal context.

Students’ strong sense of being safe in school is supported by their predominantly good behaviour. They were polite, welcoming and courteous throughout the inspection. Behaviour in most lessons is good, linked to good teaching and effective classroom management. The Pathfinder provision allows for poor behaviour to be sanctioned internally and exclusions have dropped considerably since its implementation. This has contributed to attendance figures which just remain in the average category but are improving well. Actions to reduce persistent absence have been effective and this is now below the national average.

Students are well informed about health and well-being and responsive to the school’s strategies to promote a healthy lifestyle, such as through the appointment of ‘health captains’. They take on additional responsibilities willingly. The school council reports directly to governors on its activities, which have included the formation of a cyber-bullying policy. It has successfully negotiated uniform adaptations and is currently fundraising for a covered outdoor area. Icknield students have been active beyond the school community, for example through the annual provision of a senior citizens’ Christmas party for the whole of the local community. Opportunities to visit businesses such as BMW and Oxford Business School are helping to enhance students’ employability. They gain leadership and presentation experience through the curriculum and by organising assemblies. Their well-developed basic skills lend confidence to this. Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, enjoy taking advantage of information and communication technology to conduct independent research and they speak confidently about how this enhances their skills. They understand the range of options available to them when they leave Icknield and are supported well to make informed choices. They are encouraged to be ambitious and almost all progress onto further education, employment or training. They respond well to lessons which help them to explore and understand other belief systems or values, but they lack a well-developed understanding of communities very different from their own.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
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	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	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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Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Icknield students capitalise readily on good or outstanding teaching. The best lessons allow them to collaborate and assess one another's work, which they do accurately and constructively. They track how well they are doing throughout the year, from one assessment to the next, and can articulate what they need to do to improve. Teachers are skilled in their questioning, targeting rather than asking for 'hands up' so that everyone is encouraged to think and expected to respond. Students' individual strengths and learning needs are well known and lessons planned accordingly. The work of teaching assistants often enhances provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities but monitoring of this and analysis of its impact on progress need to be sharper.

Senior leaders have been uncompromising in establishing an appropriate curriculum. They monitor provision to ensure that it is appropriately matched to student needs and interests, as well as sufficiently challenging. They have terminated provision which does not meet this requirement. As a result, the curriculum offers a good balance of academic provision and work-related pathways such as engineering. One parent wrote that they appreciated the 'gold standard' curriculum offer. The specialism supports the development of creativity, such as through the partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company and its role in developing drama teaching in primary schools. Senior leaders analyse the curriculum for impact and adapt it, for example by implementing single-sex teaching to facilitate the focus on girls' achievement. In an all-girls geography lesson, progress was outstanding because all students were challenged, involved and highly motivated. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of additional activities – 'an amazing variety for a relatively small school', in the words of one parent. Uptake of these is healthy, although sometimes limited by the rural context.

The good care, guidance and support contribute to the personal development and achievement of all students, with particular impact on the potentially more vulnerable. This is exemplified in the whole school mentoring system, which creates time for tutors to focus on individual needs and to monitor academic targets closely.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders have effectively established a vision for the school of 'excellence for all'. Leaders at all levels show a common commitment to this ambition and act collectively to realise it. The target-setting process has been reviewed since the last inspection and is now more challenging. Teaching is rigorously monitored and a range of strategies is in place to improve learning, including exchanging expertise with other schools.

The governing body is highly influential in determining the strategic direction of the school. Middle leaders appreciate the challenge from governors, whose links to subject departments inform their whole-school understanding and evaluation. Governors bring a range of expertise and experience to the school. They are passionate about their role and determined to achieve excellence for Icknield. They are a routine presence at parents' and carers' evenings and have consulted with them on significant issues such as the appointment of the new headteacher. Along with school leaders, they are rigorous and effective in ensuring the safeguarding and protection of all members of the school community. Appropriate and regular training is undertaken and staff are well informed about how to identify and act upon signs of risk.

The school communicates well with parents and carers on student progress, but is less effective in helping them to support their child's learning. A few parents and carers commented on this and inspectors agree that the school could do more to take account of their views. The school is careful to develop partnerships that offer good value for money by having a positive impact on student achievement and well-being. It also seeks to support others, particularly through the specialism, such as through the delivery of county-wide training in the teaching of Shakespeare. International partnerships to develop students' global understanding have included trips to Iceland, Sicily and France. The school is a harmonious and cohesive society, but the promotion of community cohesion in a national or international context is less well developed. The school is committed to equality of opportunity and policies to underpin this are in the process of being improved and updated. Trips overseas have included students with disabilities; financial support is available to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation in extra activities. There is ongoing evaluation of the participation and achievement of different groups of students, with gaps successfully closing.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Around 13% of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. The very large majority agreed that their child enjoys school and that the school keeps them safe. Although a large majority agreed that behaviour is well managed, a few parents and carers wrote about concerns in this area. This was explored with the school, but was not reflected in the good behaviour observed throughout the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Icknield Community 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 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 638 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	39	44	52	4	5	4	5
The school keeps my child safe	42	49	38	45	4	5	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	29	34	46	54	8	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	34	42	49	11	13	3	4
The teaching is good at this school	20	24	52	61	9	11	2	2
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	17	20	46	54	19	22	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	26	46	54	15	18	1	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)	27	32	38	45	9	11	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	27	32	44	52	11	13	3	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	26	43	51	9	11	9	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	22	47	55	8	9	5	6
The school is led and managed effectively	31	36	42	49	6	7	4	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	36	42	37	44	5	6	7	8

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



1 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Icknield Community College, Watlington OX49 5RB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. You told us how safe you feel at school and expressed confidence in your teachers and other staff to deal with any concerns that arise. We agree that staff care about you a great deal. They are determined that you will all be successful and no one will be left behind.

You make good progress in your lessons, especially in English and mathematics. You do particularly well when the teachers challenge you and give you opportunities to get actively involved in your learning. We saw some excellent examples of this, such as in English, geography and music, where you worked together with great success. We have asked the school's leaders to ensure that more of your lessons are like this, so that you can make outstanding progress in all subjects. Most of you showed a good understanding of what your targets are and what you need to do to reach them. Your individual tracker sheets help you with this, as does marking which explains clearly how to improve your work. The quality of feedback you get on your work is too variable, however, and we have also asked for this to be made more consistent.

Mr Hudson is extremely proud of all of you. He and the school governors have taken care to ensure that your new headteacher is ready to take over in September and work immediately on improving your school further. You can all help by:

- taking full advantage of every opportunity to get involved in your own learning
- keeping track of your progress in all lessons
- aiming high, to meet challenging targets in all subjects.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

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