

Lipson Community College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136668
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	382230
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2012
Lead inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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	1,320
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	281
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie McLeod
Principal	Steve Baker
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2008
School address	Bernice Terrace Plymouth PL4 7PG
Telephone number	01752 671318
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mary Massey	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Payne	Additional inspector
Dee Wheatley	Additional inspector
Kevin Wright	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed more than 14 hours of lessons taught by 33 teachers. Meetings were held with three groups of pupils, three members and the Chair of the Governing Body, and school staff, including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's records and planning documents and 75 parental, 145 student and 35 staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

Lipson is a larger than average-sized secondary school and has a sixth form which is part of a consortium with two other Plymouth schools. The college converted to academy status in April 2011 and is also a Cooperative Trust. It is a specialist performing arts college and has a theatre on site. It has gained a wide range of national awards for many aspects of its provision, including community leadership, innovative learning, information and communication technology, cultural diversity, performing arts and professional development for teachers. The Investors in People award has been held for the last 15 years.

The college is a non-selective school working within a selective system in the local area. There are fewer high-ability students and a higher proportion of low-ability students than are found nationally. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than is found nationally. The number of students joining and leaving the college at times other than the start of the school year is high. Although the proportion of minority ethnic students is low, there are a rising number of students who are at the early stages of learning English, including a small number of asylum seekers.

The college has a special unit on site for students with physical disabilities, and as a result the number of students with statements of special educational needs is high. Of the other students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, about a third have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The college meets the current floor standard.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school with a good sixth form. Students' mature approach to their studies and their outstanding behaviour around the college contribute to an exceptionally calm, safe and cooperative environment for learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The views of parents, carers, students and staff are overwhelmingly positive.
- The college was judged outstanding at the last inspection, and several aspects of its provision remain so. For example, organisation of the curriculum is exceptionally innovative and makes very creative use of time to provide students with a wide range of learning opportunities.
- Students' achievement has improved steadily over the last three years and the majority of students make good progress. Students study a high number of subjects at Key Stage 4 over three years leading to above average attainment overall. However, standards at GCSE in mathematics and to a lesser degree in English, remain low, but the rate of progress for all year groups is accelerating, especially in English. More-able students are currently making better progress than in previous years and are achieving higher grades at GCSE.
- Overall teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers provide a wide variety of activities in lessons which encourage students to be actively involved, support one another, discuss what they are doing and ask questions. However, those students with less serious special needs who are supported through school action, are not consistently provided with activities and support in lessons to maximise their progress. More-able students in mixed-ability classes are not always challenged as effectively as they are when they are taught in sets.
- The Principal and senior leaders know the college's strengths and weaknesses well and have the confidence and trust of staff, students and parents. The whole college community, including students and parents, works together

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creatively to find out what works most effectively to improve both outcomes and provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate improvements in achievement in mathematics so a higher proportion of students of all abilities make good or better progress.
- Improve the rate at which students who are supported through school action make progress by:
 - ensuring that class teachers are provided with information about appropriate strategies which can be used to meet individual needs
 - providing activities in lessons that are carefully sequenced and structured to ensure progression.
- Ensure that more-able students are consistently challenged to make the maximum progress by:
 - providing activities in lessons that are carefully sequenced and structured to ensure progression, thus meeting their needs
 - using questioning effectively to deepen understanding.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The very large majority of parents responding to our survey believe that their child is making good progress at the college. Attainment on entry to the college is low, but achievement at GCSE in some areas is significantly above the national average, for example, the proportion of students achieving five grades at A* to C and A* to G. However, achievement in English and mathematics is low, although standards have risen steadily over time and in English are likely to come close to the national average for Year 11 in 2012. Early testing of Year 7 students indicates that literacy skills for many are not secure when they arrive at the college. Intensive efforts to tackle this, through extra curriculum time in Key Stage 3, literacy training for teachers in all subjects and special intervention for those students who are struggling with reading and writing, are beginning to have a positive impact. All year groups are now making good progress in English. As a result of some difficulties with staffing, improvements in mathematics have been slower, but the rate of progress in lessons is now satisfactory and improving quickly. Nearly all the students surveyed said that the college helps them develop skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics, and this was evident to inspectors both in lessons and in students' work.

As a result of careful tracking, monitoring and personalised support, often provided by well-trained teaching assistants, students who are known to be eligible for free school meals make similar and sometimes better progress than their peers. The

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progress of more-able students is accelerating and an increasing proportion are achieving higher grades and making good progress in lessons. Students with statements, including those in the physical impairment unit, and students with more serious special educational needs, also make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Students supported through school action often make satisfactory rather than good progress in lessons, because their needs are not always consistently met. Provision for students who are at the early stages of learning English is well organised and many of these students make outstanding progress.

Quality of teaching

Teachers' strong subject knowledge and high expectations within the framework of an outstanding curriculum consistently lead to rapid development of students' skills and understanding in lessons. Lessons are well planned with clear lesson objectives and activities that are sequenced to ensure students understand each step and can make progress. The principles of cooperative learning are consistently used across all subjects, so lessons involve group work and encourage students to talk and ask questions about their learning. Training to develop the self-motivation, initiative and skills to work independently starts in Year 7. This prepares students well for study at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Work is marked regularly and feedback provided for students so they know how to improve, although they are not always given time to respond to advice, nor do teachers consistently check that it has been acted on. In many project-based subjects, such as information and communication technology and performing arts, students value the comprehensive individualised feedback that is given verbally.

In a few weaker lessons seen during the inspection, there was insufficient focus on the quality of students' learning and the pace was too slow, either because the teacher talked for too long, or tasks were too open ended with not enough guidance or structure provided. The activities and support provided by teachers for those students with less serious special educational needs are frequently not sufficiently structured or carefully planned to meet individual students' needs and ensure maximum progress, either in the lesson or over time. Although teachers demand a great deal from more-able students when they work in set groups, in some mixed-ability classes the work they are given is sometimes not sufficiently challenging, nor does the teacher probe and develop understanding through high quality open questioning.

The college's specialism of performing arts is central to the curriculum, and opportunities for students to experience and be involved in theatre, music and dance are extensive. This contributes very well to their self-confidence and spiritual and cultural development.

The very large majority of parents responding to our survey believe that their child is well taught at the college.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

The happy family atmosphere at the college, where students say they are listened to, means that no-one is left out and everyone is known well as an individual. Students are proud to be part of the college community, say that they always feel safe and that teachers really help them to learn. The unusual 'specialist guild' system for pastoral care encourages students to use tutorial time to develop a wide range of skills in groups with a common interest. These mixed-age groups and students who act as lead learners provide extensive opportunities for older students to act as mentors, guides, teachers and role models for younger ones. The principles of cooperative learning implemented by teachers mean that students work together very effectively in groups and are exceptionally tolerant of one another. Students arriving at the school from other cultures, often with little English, say they feel welcomed and well supported by other students. Students with physical disabilities are included in nearly all mainstream activities, and the vast majority choose to stay into the sixth form. Guild councils and Cooperative Trust members are consulted regularly to elicit student opinions about the quality of teaching and provision, thus developing a good understanding of the democratic process. This system forms an effective conduit for exchange of views between senior managers and students.

Nearly all students responding to questionnaires and interviewed during the inspection said that behaviour is consistently good around the school and in lessons, which contrasts with the view of a small minority of parents. In conversations with inspectors, students, including those with physical disabilities, explained that bullying is very rare and that if it does occur it is dealt with very effectively and promptly. Racist and homophobic attitudes are not tolerated; one student said, 'it's okay to be different.' Praise is used more often than sanctions; students understand what is expected of them and respond readily to correction. Exclusions are low and have dropped sharply over the last three years.

Attendance has risen strongly and the proportion of students who are persistently absent has fallen sharply over the last three years and both figures are approaching the national average. Systems for improving attendance are efficient and effective.

Leadership and management

Staff describe the Principal and senior team as active, visible leaders, constantly visiting classrooms, and listening to their views and those of students. The information collected from monitoring the college's work and an active interest in current educational research helps them to identify 'what works best' for students. The resulting improvement plans are clearly focused on students' outcomes. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching to outstanding are relentless, and senior leaders' assessments of strengths, impact and weaknesses are accurate and sharp. Frequent professional development and peer coaching, often using expertise already in the college, make teachers ambitious to improve. Regular analysis of tracking data is used to identify and provide support for students who are underachieving. Until recently, in order to ensure that the college met the government's floor standards,

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the focus has been on students' attainment at GCSE rather than their progress over time. The system is now extended to include students of all ability and groups of students with specific needs. Improvements to students' behaviour, the quality of teaching and achievement, especially those within groups, all demonstrate commitment to equality of opportunity and at least good capacity to improve further.

The curriculum is outstanding and is organised to allow students to experience a wide range of academic and vocational subjects over three years at Key Stage 4, and study them in depth for short periods of time. Additional time to develop interests is provided through the creative use of 'Wicked Wednesday', tutorial time and a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities to work within the local community. Students describe the curriculum as highly motivating, especially the emphasis on performing arts.

The governing body holds the college to account effectively and, in collaboration with senior leaders, makes very effective arrangements to ensure students' safety. Senior managers are challenged robustly about students' achievement. The views of parents are sought through questionnaires and concerns can be raised at any time through Parent Voice. In their responses to inspection questionnaires a very few parents felt that communication with the college could be improved.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Lipson Community College, Plymouth PL4 7PG

This letter is to thank you for your help during the recent inspection and to give you our findings. We were very impressed by the positive welcome you gave to us. This is what we found out during the inspection, and the further improvements we have recommended.

- Lipson is a good school and achievement has risen steadily over several years. Although many of you leave the college with a high number of GCSE and vocational qualifications, too few of you make rapid enough progress in English and mathematics. English is already improving quickly, but we have asked the college to accelerate the progress you make in mathematics.
- We were very impressed by the happy, positive atmosphere in the college, where everyone is treated as an individual and it is 'okay to be different'. Your behaviour is excellent, both in lessons and around the college. You told us you feel safe, listened to and well cared for and that the staff are there to help if you need them. Your attendance is improving all the time, but could still be better.
- You also told us that teaching is improving so more of you are making good progress. You like the way teachers organise very active lessons with lots of discussion and group work. They also help you to improve your literacy and communication skills in subjects other than English. We have asked teachers to make sure that those of you with less serious special educational needs are given more guidance in lessons and those who are more able are challenged.
- The curriculum is outstanding and you told us you enjoy the 'short, fat courses' at GCSE, performing arts, and the opportunities to learn different things on 'Wicked Wednesday' and in tutorial sessions.
- The college's senior leaders and staff value your views and use them to help decide what works best for you. You told us that you trust them to listen and continue to make improvements to the college.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector

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