

Leasowes Community College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103861
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	376981
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1017
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Withers
Headteacher	Neil Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Turner

Additional inspector

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 40 lessons taught by 39 teachers. Many of these visits were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team. They held meetings with staff, students and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at 359 parent and carer questionnaires, 41 staff questionnaires and 144 student questionnaires, assessment records, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body and the college's action plans and evaluations.

Information about the school

Leasowes is a larger than average business and enterprise specialist school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups of these are students who are from Indian and Pakistani heritages. The proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs and those who are learning English as an additional language are broadly average. Results for 2011 are above the government floor standards.

The Principal was appointed from January 2012 having previously held that position in an acting capacity. The school has recently been awarded the Panasonic National Award for Best Reporting Team and a Year 7 student has been selected to be an Olympic torch bearer.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory college. It is not good because achievement in mathematics is satisfactory, teaching is not consistently good, attendance is improving but remains low and leaders do not make the best use of available data to set challenging targets and to evaluate the impact of initiatives.
- Low and middle attaining students achieve well. The college has been successful in reducing the achievement gap for students known to be eligible for free school meals and improving the achievement of higher attaining students. Achievement in mathematics has been low because students have limited understanding of the mathematical concepts and do not make connections for themselves. There have been significant improvements this year and results from completed modules show that achievement is satisfactory.
- Students say they feel safe. Behaviour is good around school and in the vast majority of lessons. Attendance does not have a high profile around the school and there is not always a clear overview to monitor and evaluate improvement strategies. Attendance is lower on a Friday when the college runs a different curriculum day.
- In the majority of lessons when teaching is good or better students are highly motivated and consequently learn well. Lessons are pacy and teachers use questions well to extend knowledge and understanding. When teaching is satisfactory lessons lack challenge, introductions are overlong and marking does not inform students how to improve.
- Leaders have a clear ambition which is shared by all staff. The Principal has introduced systems to ensure greater accountability and to improve the quality of teaching. This has brought about improvements to the quality of teaching and demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve. However these are not always evaluated against available data and success criteria in improvement plans are not always challenging or broad enough.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics by:
 - ensuring students develop understanding of key mathematical concepts
 - making greater use of mathematical investigation for students to make connections for themselves

- Improve further the quality of teaching and learning so that by March 2013 teaching is consistently good or better by ensuring:
 - all lessons engage, motivate and challenge students to learn well
 - students start their learning quickly in lessons without listening to overlong introductions
 - assessment, including marking, is used consistently to inform students how well they are achieving, what they can do to improve and then gives them opportunities to respond to the advice.

- Raise levels of attendance to at least the national average by:
 - giving attendance greater prominence around the school so that students are constantly aware of the need and benefits of good attendance
 - ensuring a clear strategic direction to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives to improve attendance
 - ensuring activities planned for Friday are of a consistently high quality

- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels by ensuring:
 - greater use of the available data to measure the impact of initiatives
 - all success criteria within improvement plans are challenging and those for achievement are based around measures of both attainment and progress.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter the college with broadly average attainment. Achievement is satisfactory and improving, although in 2011 higher attaining students did not achieve as well as others. The college has quickly responded to this, including working closely with parents and carers, and ensured they now achieve better. Students whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable along with disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve well. The proportion of students who achieve five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C is well above average. Achievement in mathematics has been low. The college has given considerable extra support including well attended weekend sessions and additional lessons. In 2011 the school was successful in narrowing the gap between students known to be eligible for free school meals and students overall. Students from an Indian or Pakistani background achieved well. Results in the specialist subjects of

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business and information communication technology are very good.

During the inspection, the inspectors observed students making satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. Responses from the parents and carers show that most say that their children make good progress at the college. Learning was best when the lesson engaged and enthused students. For example, in English students were highly motivated when looking at anthologies. Questioning was often used well to enable students to give reasons for their answers, as for example in science when learning about different types of energy. This helped students develop better reasoning skills. However, at times, students were less engaged often because they had to wait too long before getting down to their work. The strong emphasis on improving results in mathematics meant teachers sometimes talked for too long, so that students lacked opportunities to make connections for themselves or to develop a good understanding of their work.

In some lessons, students demonstrate good literacy skills, for example being expected to use correct grammar when writing extended pieces of work in humanities. Daily sessions for students to improve their reading have been successful in increasing the number of students who read for pleasure. However teaching assistants and mentors who support students are not always sure how to improve reading skills. Disabled students and those with special educational needs often make good progress in lessons and those who receive additional help in both the Access centre and at the Greenhill site achieve well, despite their significant barriers to learning. The college supports children who are looked after very well.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers along with the large majority of students say teaching is good. However inspectors judged the quality as satisfactory. It has improved with many lessons incorporating interesting and engaging activities. When teaching is good or better, lessons are well-planned and get off to a purposeful start and teachers ensure students quickly become engaged in their work, often making good use of electronic whiteboards. Students' learning is extended by well-focused questioning which develops their understanding. Marking is good and it informs students what they need to do to improve. This advice is often very specific and helpful but students are not given sufficient opportunity to respond to it. Key aspects of literacy are identified and students have opportunities to develop their numeracy skills across a variety of subjects. For example linking calculations to when learning different words for rooms during Spanish.

When teaching is satisfactory, lessons are less dynamic and opportunities to engage and enthuse students are missed. Teachers talk for too long at the start of the lesson before students get down to their work. Consequently learning is not as focused and the pace slows. At times marking does not identify specifically what students need to do to improve and there is too long a gap between occasions when books are marked.

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Teaching often allows students to be highly reflective on spiritual matters, for example in English. Students gain an insight into different cultures, for example within art. They consider moral aspects, for example when considering the change in the population balance before and after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and social understanding, for example in games when students work well in groups.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most students say they feel safe and this is confirmed by responses from parents and carers. Students have a good understanding of the dangers of substance abuse. The college is very successful in guiding students who are in need of additional help, including from the nurse. Students are aware of different types of bullying. They say they have received good support to overcome instances of cyber-bullying, although some older students leave themselves open to problems by giving too much information on social network sites. If a bullying incident occurs staff give effective support to both victim and perpetrator. Views from parents and carers are mixed. While most say bullying is dealt with well a few say there are problems which have not always led to a satisfactory outcome.

Behaviour around college is good with students being polite and courteous. However, responses from parents, carers and students say behaviour in lessons is variable and feel that while it is predominately good, there are times when students lose interest and are not fully involved with their learning.

Attendance is low. It has improved and the college is making great efforts to improve it further, for example by employing two attendance officers and informing parents and carers immediately when their child is absent. Pastoral leaders support students well but there is no clear overview to analyse how effective strategies to improve have been. The college celebrates students' achievement well around school but there is no similar profile given to attendance issues. On Fridays students have a different curriculum and they work on an area for the whole day. Students say attendance is lower then because they did not always enjoy this work.

Leadership and management

The effective leadership provided by the Principal has made a significant difference to the way in which the college operates. He has the respect of staff and students and his ambition and drive are shared. Consequently virtually all staff who completed questionnaires say they are proud to be a member of staff and the college is well led and managed. There have been a wide variety of new initiatives and while there is a wealth of data this is not always used effectively to evaluate the impact of these on student outcomes. The college's self-evaluation is over-generous. The improvement plan identifies the key areas for further improvement. However some success criteria lack sufficient challenge or those for achievement are based only upon pass rates for A*–C.

The quality of teaching has improved through effective performance management,

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professional development and close monitoring by leaders at all levels. Middle leaders say they now take responsibility for ensuring the quality of teaching is improving and they are held to account by their link member of the senior leadership team. Recent improvements to the quality of teaching, increased rates of attendance and improvements in achievement demonstrate the satisfactory capacity to carry on improving. Leaders have identified that the curriculum, which has been seen as highly innovative in previous inspections, now needs to be evaluated to ensure it still meets the needs of students. Business and enterprise are used well. Students enjoy opportunities to complete internships at local businesses, for example Jaguar. The curriculum supports students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in individual subjects but opportunities are not always co-ordinated in a systematic way. The college worked appropriately to challenge a student who shared extremist views during an English talk.

Leadership of the college has worked well to narrow the gap between the achievement of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and hence promote equality and tackle discrimination. They have also been successful in supporting a number of students whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable, including pregnant girls or those who have been excluded from other schools.

Governance is effective and holds the college to account. The governing body takes its responsibility towards children who are looked after very seriously and reports their progress at every meeting. There is a similar attention from members of the governing body, along with all staff, to ensure all aspects of safeguarding meet current requirements and that the college is as safe as possible.

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 college converters. Secondary schools include secondary college converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special college 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.

2 March 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Leasowes Community College, Halesowen, B62 8PJ

When I visited your college recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. Thank you very much for your help and cooperation. We were impressed with your courtesy and manners, and how well you get on with each other. These are some of the reasons why we judged your college satisfactory.

Our observations showed that achievement is rising and is satisfactory. Mathematics is still an area where the college needs to improve. We have asked that you have more opportunities to make connections for yourselves and this helps you understand your work. The college makes sure that you follow a curriculum which helps prepare you for the future, especially those who enjoy the work on your internships. The curriculum also ensures that you have opportunities to think about the spiritual elements of your studies, think about moral issues which are relevant today, work sociably together in groups and learn about a wide variety of cultures.

We observed 40 lessons and saw that you enjoy some interesting lessons. We judged that teaching is satisfactory. We have asked the college to improve the quality of lessons further so that you are always challenged, that teachers make sure you get down to work quickly and that marking tells you how to improve. You can help by always responding to the advice you have been given. We judged behaviour as satisfactory and attendance low. We have asked the college to make sure you are always aware of the need to attend well, that know how effective strategies are at improving attendance and that Friday lessons are always interesting. Again you can help by making sure you never take any unnecessary time off.

Staff care for you and you say you feel safe. The Principal and other senior leaders have identified what needs to be done and they are very determined to carry on improving the college. They have an improvement plan although the targets are not always sufficiently challenging or focus on all achievement measures. They are supported by staff and members of the governing body. We wish you well at this improving college and hope you carry on helping it to get even better.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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