

New River College KS4

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100391
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	376388
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Craig Smillie
Executive Headteacher	Nigel Smith
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 July 2009
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Age group	14–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Eight lessons were observed, each featuring a different teacher or tutor. Discussions were held with members of the management committee, students, the headteacher, senior staff and a variety of stakeholders who work in partnership with the college. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the college's work and looked at students' work. In addition, questionnaire responses from two parents or carers, fourteen staff and nine students were analysed and their views taken into account.

Information about the school

New River College Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit is part of New River College, the local authority's overarching provision for pupil referral units. Most students have been, or face the prospect of being, permanently excluded from mainstream secondary schools. The majority of students are males. Students come from a range of ethnic heritages; about 30% are White British. A small group of students speak English as an additional language. All those attending the centre are identified as disabled or have special educational needs, mainly behavioural, emotional or social needs. At nearly 20%, the percentage who have a statement of special educational needs is also well above average, as is the proportion known to be entitled to free school meals. Many students also experience significant barriers to learning because of their literacy and language needs. Since its previous inspection, the college has undergone a major reorganisation. An executive headteacher has been appointed and a new headteacher started in post in January 2012. The college is accommodated in temporary accommodation. New facilities are being constructed nearby.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The college offers all students a good education. The executive headteacher has successfully led the college through a period of change and uncertainty associated with reorganisation. Overall effectiveness is good rather than outstanding because the attendance of some students and the quality of teaching are not consistently high enough to result in outstanding progress for all students.
- Most students achieve well. Their good achievements are enhanced by an effective and developing curriculum. An emphasis on developing skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT), and an improved provision of vocational options, has significantly boosted achievement.
- Most teaching is good and is successful in boosting levels of attainment. In some lessons, students are not given sufficient time to reflect on what they have learnt.
- Behaviour and safety are good; the college is happy, safe and harmonious. Students' good behaviour contributes well to their learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Students have opportunities to exercise responsibility through sport and multicultural art events, for example.
- The executive headteacher is well supported by the headteacher and all members of staff. Reorganisation has seen improvements in the management committee; they offer good, critical support. Self-evaluation is accurate; strengths identified at the previous inspection have been maintained and in some cases further developed, and the college has improved well. Much emphasis is placed on improving the quality of teaching through effective performance management. The use of target setting and the monitoring of all aspects of every student's work and conduct have improved.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure higher levels of progress for all by:
 - providing quality time in every lesson for students to reflect on, and discuss, what they have learnt
 - strengthening the drive to improve the attendance rates of the minority of students who have poor attitudes towards attending college.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The achievement of most students is good. Most make good progress and their achievements are far in excess of what was predicted when they joined the college. Some Year 11 students are making at least good progress in their English and mathematics GCSE courses and are predicted to gain grades at Level C or above. Parents and carers rightly praise the progress made by their children.

Students enter the college with low levels of prior attainment, often as a result of the disruption they have faced in their education. When they leave at the end of Year 11 to enter further education, training or employment, standards remain below average but higher than forecast when they entered. Most make at least good progress in their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Students heard reading in English lessons read well and apply their skills well, for example catering students showed an ability to read recipes accurately. GCSE results show a good trend of improvement. Good achievement is supported by the college's improved tracking systems. However, the performance of a small minority of White British students is below that of their peers. The main reason for this is their below-average attendance. There is little variation in the performance of boys and girls with the large majority of students showing good and sometimes excellent improvements in their attendance and behaviour, which contributes to their overall good achievement. A good and evolving curriculum also helps. The improving personalised provision is ensuring that potentially vulnerable and disadvantaged students are able to follow successfully courses that meet their needs.

Students make good progress in most lessons. In an English lesson on poetry, for example, they developed their skills in empathy and use of language well. Their use of adjectives to describe feelings and emotions was impressive. This was supported by some good and accurate written work. They also develop independent learning skills well, for instance in a Year 10 catering lesson, they followed recipes and measured ingredients accurately.

Quality of teaching

Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to secure outcomes for the students that are at least good. Lessons are planned well and care is taken to ensure that individual needs are met. Most lessons are taught in a way that engages and interests the students. In the best lessons, students make rapid progress because independent and collaborative work is promoted well. This was amply illustrated in a

most effective Year 10 drama lesson. Students worked well together in a number of role-play activities. This led to students discussing their feelings and emotions, which successfully developed their vocabulary as they started to write their own poetry. This was a lively and unusual lesson that successfully encouraged the students to express themselves and to widen their vocabulary. All participated well and enjoyed the challenges presented.

The most effective lessons feature high expectations and challenge. Students are encouraged to work independently and, where appropriate, read and investigate for themselves. Some of the written work seen was well presented, interesting to read and accurate in terms of spelling and punctuation. Most students are developing their literacy skills well. Though much teaching was good and the vast majority of lessons featured good learning, too many lessons finished without time being given for the students to reflect on what they had learnt. Final plenary sessions were either rushed, or were not attempted, thereby denying students opportunities to discuss and further extend their learning.

Teachers take advantage of opportunities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teamwork and responsibility are fostered well. The evolving curriculum offers students opportunities to try things that they might otherwise never have been able to experience. Work with rugby coaches and staff from Arsenal Football Club, for example, enables students to develop responsibility and healthier lifestyles by developing their physical fitness.

The few parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are correct in their view that the teaching provided is good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are provided with working environments where they are safe, secure and well cared for. They know how to keep safe and, in their inspection questionnaires, students, parents and carers all indicated that the college is safe and secure. Though a small minority of parents, carers and students expressed disquiet about behaviour, evidence shows that behaviour over time is good and improving. Many students arrive with histories of poor behaviour. The college successfully instils a sense of personal responsibility and most students behave well most of the time. Where there are occasional lapses, staff apply the college's procedures consistently well so that disruption is minimised.

In many of the lessons observed, students' good behaviour made a significant contribution to their learning. Evidence of their engagement with learning is further provided by the improving attendance rates. Attendance for most students is well above what they achieved in mainstream schools and many are attending at rates that at least mirror the national average rate for secondary-aged students. A small minority of mainly White British students still do not attend often enough. Fixed-term exclusions are low and falling, which is a good outcome for a college where all students arrive with behavioural and emotional needs. In part, these positive outcomes reflect improvements in the personalised and varied curriculum, which is successfully engaging students and helping them to gain better results. Risk assessments for off-site work are detailed and thorough. Students develop a good

awareness of how to stay safe and have a well-developed understanding of different forms of bullying. Incidents of bullying and harassment, including those based on race, gender or sexual orientation, are rare. When they arise, they are dealt with quickly and appropriately.

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher provides good leadership and has skilfully led the college through reorganisation. He is well supported by the recently appointed headteacher, a good staff team and an effective management committee. Staff morale is high; every respondent to the staff inspection questionnaire said they were proud to work in the college. There is a strong focus on improving students' achievement. Equality of opportunity is promoted vigorously, especially through the good and varied curriculum, and discrimination is not tolerated. Since the previous inspection, the monitoring and tracking of students' work have improved significantly; the performance of different groups is closely monitored. As a result, the performance of most White British students has improved. The curriculum now offers far more vocational options, which is resulting in students gaining more qualifications and being better equipped for their next step. Partnerships with colleges, other educational providers and organisations like the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are a strong feature of the college's work and are helping to secure better outcomes for this group of potentially vulnerable and disadvantaged youngsters. Safeguarding procedures are robust. The site is safe and appropriate provision, including detailed risk assessments, is made for off-site education.

Self-evaluation is accurate and has led to improvements in target setting and monitoring of students' progress, resulting in better academic, personal and social outcomes. A keen focus on professional development for staff has contributed to the improved outcomes by enhancing the quality of teaching, especially the tracking and monitoring of students' progress. The management committee is improving and members understand the challenges facing the college. They give good support and are becoming more involved in monitoring progress and holding the college to account.

Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has continued to evolve well. A more personalised provision, comprising a mix of traditional subjects, key skills and vocational options, has led to better achievement as students can follow programmes that meet their needs. Achievement is also rising because staffing is now more stable and teachers and teaching assistants work well in unison for the benefit of all students. The improved curriculum, allied to good extra-curricular provision through art competitions, music and sport, for example, promotes students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development effectively.

The college has been through a difficult period of transition but has maintained its strengths since its previous inspection and has improved in some areas, notably behaviour. Its success is shown by the levels of satisfaction expressed by parents and carers, and the students themselves, anecdotally and in inspection questionnaires. The college has a good capacity to improve further.

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.



19 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of New River College KS4, Dowrey Street, London, N1 0HY

I thoroughly enjoyed my recent visit to your college. I enjoyed talking with you and learning about your views. You told me that the college is good and that you are happy with the education you receive. The inspection confirms that you are receiving a good education.

I liked many things. You are taught well and benefit from a good and improving curriculum. Your teachers and all other staff are keen for you to succeed. In most lessons, the work set is challenging and engages you. You are also given many good opportunities to develop your skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, at the end of lessons, you are not consistently given enough time to reflect on what you have done and what you have learnt. Some of you could make even more progress if your attendance improved. I have asked the headteacher and the staff to ensure that you make higher levels of progress by:

- providing quality time in every lesson for you to reflect on, and discuss, what you have learnt
- strengthening further the drive to improve your attendance rates, especially those of you who have poor and casual attitudes about attending college.

All of you can play a big part in securing further improvements by working with your teachers.

Thank you for making my visit enjoyable. I enjoyed meeting you all and I greatly appreciated the food you prepared for me. The jerk chicken was very tasty!

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham
Lead inspector

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