

Birkbeck School and Community Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120653
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	358811
Inspection dates	22–23 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Roger Whittaker

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	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Stevens
Headteacher	Lynda Dobson
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons, observed 19 teachers and held meetings with governors, the school improvement partner, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and monitoring data in relation to students' progress and the quality of teaching. They also analysed 137 questionnaires from parents and carers, 130 questionnaires from students and 24 questionnaires from staff.

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

- How does the school's assessment show that students have made good progress between Years 7 and 11?
- How successful is the leadership and management of the school in identifying and tackling weaknesses and bringing about sustained improvement?
- How does the school demonstrate that teaching is consistently good?

Information about the school

Birkbeck School is a considerably smaller than average school. It is a specialist art college with the addition, in 2009, of a second specialism of science with mathematics. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with statements of educational needs, is higher than the national average. Most students are of White British heritage, with only a few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has National Healthy Schools status and the Artsmark Gold Award. The school has experienced a period of staffing difficulties in recent years, and therefore most of the senior leadership team and the middle leaders' team are relatively new to their positions.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Birkbeck School is a satisfactory school that has improved in several key areas in the last year. Changes to the curriculum and the good care, guidance and support reflect the senior leaders' understanding of students' needs. The school's systems to improve students' personal development and the appropriateness of the curriculum are engaging most students more effectively so that behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and progress overall satisfactory. As a result attainment has improved with the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE grades including English and mathematics at A* to C closing the gap with the national average. In some subjects, including English, the present Year 11 students are now working at levels in line with the national average. Other outcomes for students have benefited from the improved provision. For example, students' attendance is now above national average and students adopt safe practices well. The school's specialist arts college status has a satisfactory impact with strengths in participation in art related courses and extra-curricular activities.

The school has satisfactory capacity, not only to sustain current levels of performance, but also to improve further, because it has a track record of improvement in key areas. These include addressing the significant staffing difficulties and achieving the challenging targets set by National Challenge and now by the school itself. Self-evaluation has improved and is now satisfactory. The headteacher and senior leaders have set a clear vision for improvement and staff understand what they need to do to achieve these goals. There is still inconsistency, however, in the quality of the implementation and review of planned actions by leaders at all levels. School leaders do not ensure that high quality of assessment data is consistently available to teachers so that they can support learning through lesson planning and activities. Although teaching has improved, it is overall satisfactory and there remains inconsistency in the use of assessment to inform students how well they learnt throughout lessons and at the end of the lesson. Teaching does not always enable students to actively participate in lessons or to work on tasks which meet their individual needs. The school's monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough and does not focus on the learning seen during lessons, which results in difficulties in identifying training requirements for staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Remove the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching so that the large majority of lessons are good or outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons that meet the needs of all students
 - learning activities enable students to participate more actively in their learning

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- teachers use assessment to inform students how well they learnt throughout the lesson and at the end of the lesson.
- Ensure consistency in the quality of leadership and management at all levels so that:
 - the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching is focused on the learning and progress of students seen in lessons
 - the quality of assessment data available for teachers enables them to use the data to support learning through lesson plans and activities.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students join the school with below average attainment. By the time they leave, the majority have attainment which is below the national average. In 2008 the school suffered a dip in results, due in main to a period of significant changes in staffing both at senior and middle management levels and among teachers. The senior leadership managed to deal with the situation and, consequently, improve the learning and progress of students. The present year 11 students are on track to achieve the school's challenging targets for five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics and so achieve in line with national averages. The number of students achieving five A* to G GCSE grades has been consistently above average. Students' attitudes to learning and their ability to apply themselves in lessons are good. This is reflected in the satisfactory and improving progress they make in lessons. In an English lesson students used self and peer assessment, based on a good knowledge of grade descriptors, to recognise the good progress that they were making. The progress of individual students, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the few students from minority ethnic groups, is in line with the overall rate of progress.

Students' demonstrate many positive attributes in their personal development. They show a good understanding of how to be safe. Attendance has improved and is now above national averages. Bullying incidents are very rare and students are confident that there is always a member of staff to talk to should the need arise. Students are particularly enthusiastic about the 'Access Centre' where they feel there is always support, whatever the need may be. Behaviour is good and students conduct themselves in a mature manner. Students appreciate the time spent on developing an understanding of how to be healthy and many adopt a healthy lifestyle. Year 11 talked about how the 'Coffee Bar' helps them to have a healthy diet.

Students are effective members of the school community and the wider community. For example, they play a prominent leadership role in working together with local schools and the community, promoting collaboration in the interest of all the village's young people, through hosting the annual village craft show. Students have a good awareness of the value of diverse cultures and moral, spiritual and social issues as a result of all age days when students take part in activities to develop their understanding of a multicultural world and links with a school in Kenya.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
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
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

There is too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching. It is satisfactory overall but ranges from inadequate to outstanding. Where progress is good, the relationship between students and the teacher creates a positive environment for learning. Some teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subject and transmit their enthusiasm to the students. In the best lessons teachers use a wide range of activities, which engage students in their learning. For example, in a business and finance lesson students were able to work cooperatively analysing pie and bar charts and demonstrated significant gains in self analysis skills. Despite strengths in teaching, there remain too many inconsistencies. Opportunities are missed to use assessment information to enable students to work on activities which meet their individual needs and students are not always aware of what they can do and how to improve. In too many lessons, students are not given the chance to work on activities which enable them to develop independent learning skills.

The school continues to develop the curriculum to ensure it more effectively meets the differing needs and aspirations of all groups of students. Students comment very positively about the range of opportunities available to them, both within the curriculum and as extra-curricular activities. There is a good choice of options including a substantial range of diploma courses. The school is making efforts to meet the needs of individual students such as an increase in music provision. Increasing use of cross-curricular topics helps

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students to link ideas and so extend learning. Extra-curricular opportunities have been increased by the specialism and resulted in higher participation in art related activities.

Students and parents are enthusiastic in their praise of the good care, guidance and support provided by the school. One parent said 'My son has recently moved to the school and I am pleased with how well he has been supported by the staff'. The school has very strong provision to promote the care and well-being of students, however, they do not always promote students learning as well as they can. Students are known as individuals, and a strong pastoral structure supports intervention, where necessary, through good links with outside agencies. Evidence was seen of the good provision made for students with diverse and challenging needs. Effective transition arrangements ensure that students who join Year 7 settle into their new school quickly and smoothly. Strong systems are in place to promote attendance and have resulted in above average attendance figures.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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?

Parents and students are very positive about the school and how effectively it prepares the students as polite and respectful young people. The drive and enthusiasm of the headteacher has ensured that all staff are focused on the care, guidance and support of the students. Effective recruitment strategies have been used to ensure that restructuring of the staff has played a significant part in improving the students' progress, following the 2008 dip in standards. The headteacher now has a clear vision for further improvement, which is supported by the relatively recently formed senior leadership team. As a result many staff show a willingness to improve their practice. Roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined and staff are beginning to be accountable for their performance. As a result the personal development of students has improved and the curriculum and care, guidance and support are now good. However, there is still some variation in the quality of leadership and management, at all levels, resulting in a lack of consistency in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and in the implementation and monitoring of planned procedures and policies, especially the quality and use of assessment data to inform lesson planning.

The school has appropriate systems to communicate with parents and carers, which is demonstrated by the positive response through the parent questionnaires. Extensive and effective partnerships with other schools and outside agencies enhance the school's provision and have contributed well to the improving achievement and well-being of students.

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The school's promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. While all groups of students' achievement is satisfactory the learning and progress in lessons varies between inadequate and outstanding. The school's approach to community cohesion is satisfactory. It recognises it is at an early stage in implementation of plans to fill gaps in provision identified in its audit to enhance students' opportunities to develop broader experiences, including an understanding and awareness of the different cultures that exist in the United Kingdom. The governing body is very enthusiastic and supportive of the school. Most governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and understand the challenges it faces. However, they do not rigorously hold the school to account for its actions and outcomes for students. Safeguarding procedures are good. Parents are very clear that they know that the school keeps their children safe and helps them to adopt safe practices.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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	3

Views of parents and carers

A minority of parents responded to the questionnaire. Most of those who did were highly positive about the education their children receive at Birkbeck School. A few said that the school does not help them enough to support their children's learning. The inspectors found that the school is aware of this and is making efforts to enable all parents and carers to support their children's learning. Most parents and carers said that the school keeps their children safe and that behaviour is good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birkbeck School and Community Arts 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 137 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 326 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	57	42	70	51	8	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	60	44	75	55	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	56	41	68	50	7	5	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	39	70	51	6	4	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	51	37	74	54	3	2	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	46	34	70	51	10	7	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	27	83	61	13	9	0	0
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)	58	42	65	47	2	1	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	39	72	53	4	3	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	53	29	66	48	7	5	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	48	35	68	50	9	7	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	58	42	65	47	4	3	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	65	47	61	45	6	4	3	2

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



24 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Birkbeck School and Community Arts College, Louth, LN11 7PN

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and were impressed with the maturity with which you told us of your views. We have decided that your school is a satisfactory school. It is improving and has some good features.

These are some of the school's strengths.

You now make satisfactory progress so that standards you reach by the end of Year 11, while below national average, are closing the gap.

Coupled with your good attendance and personal development, this means that you are now better prepared to move on to further education or training.

You contribute well to your school especially when taking responsibility as prefects or on the school council.

The teaching is satisfactory but in some lessons you are well taught and given opportunities to be involved in interesting activities.

Staff take good care of you to ensure that you are looked after well and supported during your time at the school.

The headteacher and senior staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving the work of the school further so that you are progressing and achieving as well as you can.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements.

Remove the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching so that a very large majority of lessons are good or outstanding. We have also asked them to ensure the consistency of leadership and management so that the assessment data available for teachers enables them to plan lessons, which will enable you to learn and make progress as well as you can.

You can help the teachers by continuing to work hard in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Roger Whittaker

Lead inspector

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