

The Ferrers Specialist Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122090
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	380400
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2011
Reporting inspector	David Martin 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1094
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Dennis
Headteacher	Jonathan Giles
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
School address	Queensway Higham Ferrers Rushden NN10 8LF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 33 lessons taught by 33 members of staff. Inspectors observed the college's work and looked at planning and other documentation at college and departmental level. They scrutinised students' work and college records relating to students' achievement, welfare and safety. Inspectors analysed questionnaire returns from students and staff, and from 372 parents and carers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body, staff and a number of parents and carers.

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

- How effective are steps taken by the college to improve attainment and progress, particularly in core subjects?
- How good are students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons?
- How well are lessons planned and taught in terms of meeting the needs of students with different ability levels, including the most able?
- What progress has been made in developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning?
- How well do students in the sixth form attain compared to national averages, and how good is their progress from their different starting points?

Information about the school

The Ferrers is a large, oversubscribed secondary school. It has been a Trust school since 2007, and is a specialist arts college and education-based initial teacher training (ITT) provider. It holds International School status and has been subject to substantial new building work and refurbishment, including a new applied learning block. The sixth form is part of a well-established post-16 consortium.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is around average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average but increasing. Few speak English as an additional language.

The college has had some turbulence and temporary appointments in leadership in the last two years, with a permanent appointment of Principal made in January 2011 and a subsequent restructuring of the senior leadership team. Substantial changes have also taken place within the governing body, including the appointment of a new Chair.

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

The Ferrers Specialist Arts College provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. The college retains many good features from the previous inspection, notably students' good personal development in terms of: being healthy and staying safe; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; contribution to the community; and preparation for their future economic well-being, including high attendance. These strengths are due to the good care, guidance and support that students receive.

All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, now make similar satisfactory progress that is carefully tracked. During the period of turbulence in leadership, students' attainment fell in some key aspects. Examination results declined in core subjects, particularly mathematics but also last year in English. However, other measures have remained high, particularly those that indicate that all students attain success in examinations by the end of Year 11. Some subject areas, including most specialist subjects, have also maintained good examination results. The new Principal has recognised that performance in core subjects is a priority for improvement and, supported by the restructured senior leadership team and the governing body, has developed appropriate plans to improve it. These are already having an impact, but it is too early to see the full effect on students' attainment and progress.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory but inconsistent, and has been particularly affected by staffing issues in mathematics. Although there is some good teaching across the college, the sharing of best practice has not yet made a significant impact on the majority of classrooms and not enough teaching is good or better. A recent focus on sharing assessment criteria with students was evident during the inspection. This process was, however, not always built into the lesson activity and students are often not helped to understand how they can improve their work. Classroom management is also inconsistent. The recently introduced 'behaviour for learning' approach is not always managed in an appropriate way. As a result, students are not always being clear about teachers' expectations and this leads to some low-level misbehaviour and lack of attention at times. There is a limited range of questioning, and a lack of opportunities for students to be actively involved in their work in some subjects, for example through paired and group work or in the use of ICT.

The curriculum is well planned to meet the interests of the students and is enhanced by broad specialist arts choices and opportunities made available through good links

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with partners. The wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available to all students is a further strength of the college.

The new Principal has brought a new sense of purpose to the college. Senior leaders support the re-stated aims and priorities of the college, and are energetic and determined in the pursuit of success. They, along with the governing body, have a good awareness of the college's strengths and its weaknesses, and how to go about resolving them. Some middle leaders are also taking greater responsibility for their own subjects or areas. However, the accountability for raising standards and improving teaching and learning is not fully embedded. The recent developments and planning have not had time to make a significant impact on the quality of teaching and on progress. This means that capacity to improve is not yet better than satisfactory. Recent changes to the governing body have increased the range of professional skills of its members, but they have yet to fully implement their plans for the first-hand monitoring and evaluation of college performance.

Up to 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning so that more lessons are good or better by:
 - making better use of prior assessment information to inform planning, matching work much more closely to students' different needs
 - using formative assessment more consistently well in the classroom, so students are clear about how to make progress
 - developing a wider range of questioning skills and engaging students more actively in their own learning
 - sharing best practice more widely in the college, including the effective use of new technologies.

- Ensure that recently agreed college priorities are embedded by leaders and managers at all levels, particularly in:
 - improving the progress made by students in lessons, thereby raising standards
 - ensuring consistency in classroom management and the use of behaviour management systems.

- The governing body should fully implement its plans to gather first-hand evidence of the college's work through their monitoring and evaluation activities, focusing strongly on college priorities and ensuring that planning has sharp, measurable targets.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

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From broadly average starting points, current standards represent satisfactory achievement, although it is not as strong as the college has enjoyed previously. In the lessons observed, students were typically making satisfactory progress and working at broadly average standards in English and mathematics, despite the fluctuations in results over the last two years. Standards in many other subjects have remained at a high level. Although boys do not make quite as much progress as girls, there are no significant differences in achievement between different groups. This is because the curriculum is well adapted to individual students’ interests and needs and there is good support, particularly for the more vulnerable or those with particular needs.

Inspectors saw many examples of good social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. One notable example was in a student-led assembly dealing with issues of bullying. Students contribute strongly to their own college and wider community, most notably through performing arts but also in a range of other sporting and cultural activities. They show a good understanding of other cultures, for example through links with Uganda and Vietnam. All students, unusually, study philosophy and ethics in Key Stage 4, and fundraising activities demonstrate their concern for others who are less fortunate. Students have confidence that staff will take their concerns seriously and intervene quickly if they have particular concerns. Their enjoyment of the wide opportunities that the college offers is demonstrated through high attendance rates.

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	3
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	3
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	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

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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Just less than half of the teaching seen during the inspection was good. A similar proportion was satisfactory, and a few lessons were unsatisfactory. Better teaching was more actively engaging. Lessons were conducted at a brisk pace and students were aware of how they could improve their work through effective planning and use of assessment. This was seen clearly in an art lesson, where the techniques were demonstrated well by the teacher, modelled well in students evaluating each other’s work, and clearly linked to examination grade criteria. As a result, students made rapid progress and were productive. In the weaker lessons seen, expectations of work and behaviour were not always high enough and tasks were not sufficiently well matched to students’ differing abilities and interests, resulting in some off-task behaviour. ICT was not used imaginatively to capture students’ attention and questioning was often weak, involving only a few students.

The curriculum has considerable breadth and is regularly reviewed and refined to meet students’ interests. There is increasing personalisation and different pathways are being developed, for example short courses, triple science and extensive languages options. The college has taken a leading role in the development of diplomas. Provision is particularly strong in arts subjects, where specialist accommodation is excellent. Students were especially quick to praise the extensive range of enrichment activities provided by the college beyond the normal day.

Strong pastoral support has made a real difference for many students, particularly those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable or have other particular needs. Well-targeted multi-agency support and a strong PSHE/SEAL programme address health, emotional, substance and relationship educational well. Transition is very well managed, the sixth form buddy system is highly regarded by younger students, and the parental support adviser offers effective ongoing support. The Pop-in centre meets students’ medical needs very effectively.

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?

The new Principal has brought a renewed vigour and vision to the college. The recent college improvement plan focuses on four appropriate key issues. These are raising standards; improving progress in lessons; developing ICT to enhance students’ learning; and developing more effective learners. The planned actions are clear and targeted, with departmental planning closely linked to college aims. Some

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targets are insufficiently sharp, specific or linked to measurable interim milestones. This means that senior leaders and the governing body are not able to monitor progress with sufficient precision. However, they now have a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the college and accurately evaluate its effectiveness.

The leadership and management of teaching have improved recently, and are now more sharply focused. Recently introduced departmental reviews make subject leaders increasingly accountable for improving teaching and measuring the impact of improvements on students’ progress. The college is now rightly exploring methods of promoting and sharing best practice more widely.

Partnerships with parents and carers and other providers are a strength of the college, having a positive impact on both students’ personal development and their success in a wide range of courses. The 14–19 partnership work and the college role as an ITT provider make a strong contribution. Safeguarding is good, and exemplary in some aspects, particularly in very robust record-keeping and procedures. The college plans and evaluates its community cohesion provision closely, helping students to gain a strong understanding of college, local, national and international dimensions of faith, culture, race and other pertinent issues. Equality of opportunity in accessing the vast opportunities provided by the college lies at the heart of its inclusive ethos.

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	3
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average, reflecting the inclusive nature of the intake. Attainment at A level rose in 2011 to around the national average and higher-grade passes have also improved significantly. Performance in other qualifications is more variable although broadly average. This represents good

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progress overall. Attendance is high, and the personal development of students is at least as good as in the main college. Most students are successful in attaining the higher education or training places that they aspire to.

The teaching in the sixth form during the inspection was mainly good, which supports the college’s own self-evaluation. Many staff have strong subject knowledge to offer and their work is highly regarded by students. They find staff helpful and supportive and say that many lessons are varied and enjoyable.

The curriculum offered within the consortium arrangements is very good. There is a wide range of courses at different levels, benefiting from different specialisms in the participating schools. Enrichment is also strong. There are many trips and visits and all students engage enthusiastically in a range of community leadership roles. Care, guidance and support are good. Students value their tutors highly and feel that their academic and personal progress is carefully monitored. Very good information and advice are available to them about their future.

Consortium arrangements are very well managed, with the leaders in the college playing a very full part. Leaders and managers monitor progress and outcomes very effectively and there is a strong commitment to getting the best out of each individual student. However, leaders in the school do not yet have an accurate evaluation of the overall quality of teaching delivered by Ferrers staff.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Over a third of the parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, almost twice the average response rate for secondary schools. The returns indicate that parents and carers feel the college keeps students safe. This was reflected in students’ views and confirmed through inspection findings. A number of parents and carers feel that the college could take more account of their suggestions and concerns. Recent changes to reporting systems appear to have had a positive impact, but the college has not yet fully explained the purpose of these changes to parents and carers. A number also had concerns about teaching and behaviour, which are reflected in the body of the report and supported by inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Ferrers Specialist Arts College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the college.

The inspection team received 372 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1094 pupils registered at the college.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys college	97	26	244	66	24	6	5	1
The college keeps my child safe	107	29	255	69	7	2	1	0
The college informs me about my child’s progress	118	32	232	62	18	5	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this college	89	24	241	65	28	8	9	2
The teaching is good at this college	74	20	257	69	21	6	6	2
The college helps me to support my child’s learning	56	15	262	70	44	12	6	2
The college helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	11	268	72	47	13	6	2
The college makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing college, and for children who are finishing college, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	71	19	256	69	22	6	4	1
The college meets my child’s particular needs	75	20	253	68	30	8	5	1
The college deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	75	20	224	60	49	13	9	2
The college takes account of my suggestions and concerns	45	12	244	66	44	12	6	2
The college is led and managed effectively	68	18	258	69	21	6	5	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this college	90	24	250	67	18	5	7	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 college provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a college. A college that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory college is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate college 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 colleges

Type of college	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of colleges)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery colleges	43	47	10	0
Primary colleges	6	46	42	6
Secondary colleges	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special colleges	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All colleges	10	44	39	6

New college 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 8 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained college inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of colleges inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all colleges nationally, as weaker colleges are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding colleges.

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 colleges, special colleges 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 college to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the college 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 college.
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 college's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the college. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The college'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 college, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their college.



18 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Ferrers Specialist Arts College, Rushden, NN10 8LF

We would like to thank you for the helpful contribution that you made to the recent inspection through seeing you at work and talking to you in meetings and around the college. Inspectors judged that your college offers you a satisfactory standard of education, and there are some particular good features, which include:

- your good personal development in terms of knowing how to stay healthy and safe, and your social, moral, spiritual and cultural development
- the strong contribution that you make to the local and wider community
- your high levels of attendance
- the good care, guidance and support that you receive
- the rich and varied curriculum offered, particularly in specialist subjects
- the way the college works with other partners to provide a wide range of opportunities for you all
- how effectively the sixth form operates within the consortium, providing a good quality of education.

The new Principal, the staff and the governing body are aware that certain important aspects of the college could improve, and already have plans to make that happen. We have asked them to improve teaching and learning so that most lessons are good or better. Specifically, we believe that teachers can use assessment information more consistently to plan work that is more closely matched to your individual needs and abilities. They could also tell you more clearly how to improve your work. Some lessons could be more varied and active in engaging your interest, and teachers' questioning could involve you more in your own learning. We know that many of you could make stronger progress in lessons. We are also aware that some of you lose interest in lessons and your behaviour, at times, is not what it should be. You can play your part by having a positive attitude to learning at all times and by trying to be engaged fully in all activities.

Yours sincerely

David Martin
Her Majesty's Inspector

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