

# Birkbeck School and Community Arts College

Keeling Street, North Somercotes, Louth, LN11 7PN

## Inspection dates

19–20 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In most subjects, students do not make the good progress they need so that they can do well. The standards they reach are often below national averages.
- The school's expectations of the progress that students should make are too low. The targets set for students are undemanding.
- Teaching is not consistently challenging. Many students have too few opportunities in lessons to deepen their thinking and understanding.
- Activities in lessons often do not meet the needs of all students in the class. More-able students are often given work that is too easy.
- Teacher's marking does not always give clear guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Subject and other middle leaders do not play a full part in the leadership of the school. They are not involved enough in improving teaching and learning.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students make good progress in English and in information and communication technology (ICT).
- Students who find learning difficult are supported well. They do much better than similar students nationally in English and mathematics.
- The school's checks on the quality of teaching have led to improvements. Standards have improved since the last inspection.
- Students behave well and there is very little bullying. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe there. Their attitudes to learning are good.
- The school's arrangements to check on students' welfare and to improve attendance are good. There is plenty of help for those who need it.
- Under its new leadership, the governing body has worked well with the headteacher and senior staff to drive forward improvements in teaching and achievement.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 22 lessons taught by 17 teachers, and made short visits to some others. Six of the lessons were jointly observed with other senior staff. They looked at students' past work and one inspector listened to students reading.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, and the joint Chairs of the Governing Body. An inspector held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wider range of school documents, including its self-evaluation summaries, development plan, policies and notes of meetings. They also took account of the school's analysis of assessment data, records of behaviour and other incidents, and records relating to safeguarding.
- In coming to their conclusions, inspectors also took account of the 74 responses made in the past year to the online questionnaire for parents and carers (Parent View). They also considered questionnaire responses from 35 staff.

## Inspection team

Frank Knowles, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Carol Evatt

Additional Inspector

Andrew Lagden

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Birkbeck is much smaller than the average-size secondary school. It draws students from a wide rural area, many travelling by bus for over an hour each way to and from school.
- Most students come from White British backgrounds but several minority ethnic heritages are represented typically by one or two students in each.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is very high.
- The school admits many more students who transfer from other schools during their secondary education than is usual.
- The proportion of students supported through pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support some students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and students looked after by the local authority) is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use any alternative off-site arrangements for students' learning. It has its own 'Access Centre' to provide temporary support for students who find learning in mainstream classes difficult.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school by all teachers:
  - providing challenging activities that develop students' understanding and thinking skills more deeply
  - planning alternative activities and resources that meet the needs of all students in each class, especially the more-able students
  - when marking, regularly giving written subject-specific guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their work, and ensuring that they act on it.
- Raise achievement by making sure that:
  - all teaching staff, as well as senior and middle leaders and governors, have high expectations of what students can achieve
  - the end-of-year targets set for students in each year group are more challenging.
- Make subject and middle leaders more effective by holding them rigorously to account for improving the quality of teaching.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 7 with below-average standards. They make broadly average progress during their time in the school, although this dipped below average for those who left in 2012. They leave the school with attainment below the national average.
- There are exceptions to this. In English, students make good progress and reach average standards. In ICT, students achieve consistently well. In most subjects, however, students achieve below-average standards and few make rapid progress. Although students are enthusiastic learners and know their target levels and grades, they do not always know what they need to do to achieve them.
- In most lessons observed, the steady but relatively pedestrian pace of learning meant that many students did not make the rapid progress which their achievement in some other subjects shows they are capable of. Students in Year 7, for example, made exceptional progress in ICT when they taught themselves to use new software to create an advertisement which included visual transitions and sound. In Year 11, students made similarly good progress in science when they each researched different aspects of a topic and then shared the findings within their group.
- Middle-ability and more-able students make only steady progress which rarely accelerates to the point where they reach the higher standards of which some are capable. This is because they are not given sufficiently challenging work.
- Students supported through the pupil premium make similar progress to their peers and the gap between their attainment and the rest of the school is not yet narrowing. Those leaving Year 11 in 2012 achieved approximately a grade and a half below the rest of their year in English and mathematics. Effective support is provided through the Year 7 catch-up programme for those who arrive at the school with below-average English skills, and these students make good progress as a result.
- Less-able students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs do particularly well in English and mathematics. The school makes good use of teaching assistants and additional programmes for these students. All these groups make good progress and some reach much higher standards than similar students gain nationally.
- Students in some optional courses study intensively for one year in classes with students from both Years 10 and 11. The school's data show that this has led to higher standards in these subjects compared with results from the same course run over two years, for example in sports studies. The school does not enter students in Year 10 for other GCSE examinations.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and the school has eliminated the inadequate teaching found at that time. Too much teaching still requires improvement, however, because it does not lead to students making rapid progress. Teachers' expectations of how much progress middle-ability and more-able students can make are too low, particularly in Year 7.
- Many of the activities undertaken by students in lessons do not take students beyond a basic understanding of the work. Teachers create too few opportunities for students to extend their thinking through analysis, justifying an argument or evaluation, for example. Students in Year 10

did this in a good English lesson when they worked in groups to identify and clarify different language devices used in writing, but examples such as this are not typical.

- During the inspection, few lessons were planned to match the wide range of ability found in most classes. More-able students, in particular, often did not have the opportunities they needed to move forward quickly or take greater responsibility for their learning.
- Marking is not consistently used to guide students towards their next steps in learning. Students' extended work is not always marked effectively and students do not consistently receive written guidance in on what they need to do to improve their work. Exceptions to this are in English and ICT, where marking consistently includes this guidance and a response from the student.
- Teachers have good relationships with students. As a result, students engage with the activities and contribute well to group and class discussions. Teachers' questioning to develop learning is generally good. Students are confident in marking their own and each other's work, sometimes using assessment criteria.
- Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is good. Considerable and effective use of in-class support helps these students to accelerate their learning. The school has a range of intervention programmes, especially for younger students, that support their skills development. Regular reviews of progress enable support to be tailored to students' needs.
- A new reading programme is being used to support weaker readers. Students using the programme read fluently and felt this work had improved their reading and their spelling. Although the signs are positive, it is too early to judge its effectiveness in raising standards.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students are polite, courteous to each other and to adults. They behave sensibly around the school and are attentive in lessons. The school's system of warnings and demerits works well and the number of incidents recorded has reduced.
- Students feel safe at school, a view echoed by parents and carers in their responses on the Parent View website. Students say that there is very little bullying and that, if it does happen, it is dealt with quickly and very effectively by staff. They are fully aware of homophobic and cyber-bullying and how to use the internet safely. Students feel they can always turn to member of staff if they have a problem.
- Behaviour records are reviewed weekly and staff identify unacceptable patterns of behaviour and take any necessary action. Communication with parents on behaviour matters is good, and governors are involved in discussions with students in more serious cases. The school has a good record of taking students from elsewhere whose behaviour is challenging and enabling them to continue their education more positively.
- The successful Access Centre provides a welcoming environment for students who may be experiencing difficulties or who feel insecure, and it also supports students with behaviour issues. Students in Year 7 whose circumstances may make them vulnerable receive good support from a nurture group before reintegration into mainstream classes.
- The very wide geographical area from which students travel by bus presents more than the usual challenges to the school over attendance, especially in the winter. The school has steadily

improved attendance to average but has seen a dip in the current school year. A full range of strategies, from messages home to more intensive work with families, has brought about improved attendance where they have been used, particularly among persistent absentees.

- Students have good opportunities to take on responsibility through the school council and, for older students, by becoming prefects. Prefects contribute well to students' good behaviour around the school and on school buses.

## The leadership and management

## requires improvement

- The headteacher, other senior leaders and key governors have a good understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. A clear drive to improve teaching has resulted in better progress in some subjects but there is still more to do. The dip in results in 2012 has rightly caused leaders to increase the rigour with which they check the quality of teaching.
- Subject and other middle leaders do not rigorously evaluate students' performance in their areas. They are also not sufficiently involved in checking teaching, or in strategies to improve it. This means that senior leaders are not in a position to hold them effectively to account for accelerating students' progress.
- The school has compiled very detailed data on the performance and progress of individual students. Senior staff use this well to identify students who need support and subjects where students are underperforming. However, the benchmarks against which progress is measured are not high enough. This means that the targets set by the school are too low.
- The senior leadership team also uses assessment data, along with their observations of teaching, to identify and support teachers whose classroom practice is not consistently good. Although the school has eliminated inadequate teaching, a significant amount still requires improvement.
- The school's improvement plan provides timely and clear objectives for the year, including those that stemmed from the school's examination results. The school's regular checks on teaching this year show teaching was judged to be better than that observed during the inspection. However, the lessons observed jointly indicated senior staff were making accurate evaluations.
- The local authority's School Improvement Partner has worked with the school to challenge its performance and secure a range of help in some subjects to improve teaching. While it has had some impact, this support has not yet brought improvement at a fast enough rate to improve the quality of teaching up to good.
- The school teaches the full range of subjects in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, core subjects are taught conventionally, with some other subjects taught as one-year courses to provide a wider choice. For its size, the school provides a good range of courses, which includes some vocational subjects.
- Students' social and moral development is good, but their spiritual and cultural development is not as strong. Nevertheless, staff tackle all forms of discrimination well.
- The use of school's funding through the pupil premium has been focused mainly on the development of basic skills and on enrichment. For example, it provides additional literacy and numeracy support, counselling, financial support for uniform and transport costs. It has brought

improved outcomes for less-able students but its impact on the achievement of other students is less marked. The school has very clear records that indicate how funding has been spent and for whom.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The school’s governance has grown stronger during the current school year. The Co-Chairs work well together and play key roles in the governing body’s main committees. Governors provide good levels of challenge to the school. For example, the governing body has overseen the tightening of the school’s budget to bring it back into balance from a significant deficit a year ago.
  
- The governing body and senior team share a common drive for improvement. Governors are increasingly aware of how well their school’s performance compares with others nationally, and where and how teaching needs to improve. They are fully involved in checking that pay increases are only awarded when teaching and students’ progress are good. They are well informed about the use of pupil premium funding, although not as clear about its impact. The governing body takes a strong lead in safeguarding matters, ensuring that the school meets its statutory requirements and checking that all safeguarding arrangements are in place.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	120653
<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	405952

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	321
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Grantham and Graham Stark
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lynda Dobson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 November 2010
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