

Isebrook College

Eastleigh Road, Kettering, NN15 6PT

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. Achievement in many vocational and practical subjects, and in literacy and numeracy in some age groups, is outstanding.
- The work of the senior leadership team is transforming the school and improving the students' futures and staff's career opportunities.
- The behaviour of students is good. There are few incidents or outbursts, and students say they feel safe at school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning in almost all lessons are excellent. They are keen to learn.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Staff do a great deal to support students' wide-ranging, complex needs.
- Teaching is good and is improving as a result of effective management support, training and new resources. Relationships between staff and students are excellent.
- The school provides a rich, memorable range of subjects and activities that form a very good basis for teaching and learning.
- Almost all parents, carers, staff and students are happy with the school's work.
- Careful thought has gone into recent school developments to ensure that they reinforce each other and add up to sustainable, wide-scale improvement.
- The sixth form is good and students are prepared well for further education, employment or training.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching has weaknesses which limit students' learning. Not enough is outstanding.
- The leaders responsible for the quality of provision and students' achievement in subjects are inexperienced and new to their roles.
- Achievement is not consistent in all subjects and age groups.
- A few courses are not demanding enough for more-able students.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by 12 different teachers. Eleven of these were joint observations with one of the senior leaders. Short visits were also made to two sixth form lessons in hair and beauty, and film and media studies, which included additional students from a local special school in the consortium.
- Meetings were held with various staff members including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and the five 'middle leaders'; the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body; the family support worker, and the school bursar. Informal discussions were held with students throughout the two days, in lessons and at lunchtime. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account the 12 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, and the 28 returns of an identical paper-based survey sent out the day before the inspection started. They also took into consideration the 54 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation including: students' work and records of progress; the school's self-evaluation, development and improvement plans; records of staff and students' attendance, students' behaviour and incidents; minutes of governing body meetings, and documents relating to keeping students safe.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Isebrook College caters for students with a range of needs. Most have moderate learning difficulties and some have severe learning difficulties. About half the students have additional autistic spectrum conditions. Many students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and a few have very challenging behaviour.
- The number of students on roll is rising year on year. There are more boys than girls.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- While some transfer into Year 7 from the local primary special school, many students join Isebrook from mainstream schools later in their school career.
- The number of sixth form students has nearly doubled since the previous inspection, and the sixth form occupies new, purpose-built premises.
- A much larger proportion of students than the national average is entitled to the pupil premium. This is extra government funding to support those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services.
- The college is part of a consortium of local special schools which together provide vocational opportunities for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. These are Wren Spinney School, Maplefields School, Billingbrook School and Northgate School. The school also uses EquATA, the REAL project and Moulton College for equine therapy and accreditation for certain students.
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2012, and the deputy headteacher since January 2013. Implementation of a staff restructuring was completed in January 2014. More than 10 members of staff have left the school and 22 new members of staff started at Isebrook at the beginning of this term. Most teaching assistants are now attached either to a class or to a subject. The five middle leaders have been in post for one week.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement by making sure that, in all lessons:
 - teachers plan and provide work that is at the right level of difficulty for the students
 - work for students contributes towards achieving the targets set on their individual learning plans, where appropriate
 - guidance is given to students about how they can improve their work and skills, during lessons and in marking
 - behaviour is managed consistently.
- Ensuring that all accredited courses are suitably demanding for students of all abilities, and particularly the more able.
- Providing suitable monitoring, support and guidance to the staff new to their leadership and management roles to ensure that they are effective as quickly as possible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' skills vary greatly when they first join the school. While a few have skills that are broadly average for their age, most students' skills are below average, some markedly so. This variation is due to the severity of individuals' particular learning difficulties, together with the impact that aspects such as their autistic spectrum condition, attendance at their previous school and personal difficulties have had on their ability to learn and make progress.
- Students of all abilities and needs achieve well, including those with severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions. This is due to good teaching, the interesting range of subjects and activities, and the excellent support given to help students overcome their particular personal difficulties. Students achieve a range of academic, vocational and practical accreditations at the end of Key Stage 4. This prepares them well for further education, work or training. Almost all parents and carers are very happy with their children's progress.
- The progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals and the pupil premium is comparable with other students in both English and mathematics. The pupil premium is used very effectively to help those eligible to achieve well. This is not only by supporting, for example, improvement in literacy skills, but often by improving individuals' well-being and personal development which leads to improved achievement. Examples include the provision of breakfast, which encourages students to attend school regularly and concentrate in lessons, and the provision of music coaching for students who have this particular talent.
- Almost all students make at least the progress expected, and many make better progress than this. Individual students' records show that their skills usually increase more quickly than expected, so that the gap identified between their attainment and that of their peers when they first join the school closes.
- In lessons, students are usually keenly interested in what they are doing and demonstrate clearly what they have just learned. One such example was in science, where Year 11 students explained how one form of energy transfers to another form. They demonstrated this by rubbing hands together (movement energy), so producing heat energy.
- Progress in the sixth form is good, with outstanding progress in practical and vocational subjects such as horticulture, and film and media studies. Students achieve a wide range of accreditation, and the number and range of awards increases year on year. Progress in literacy and communication is not as good because the focus on helping individuals to continue to improve their key academic skills dropped off in recent years. This was due to less effective systems for assessing and tracking students' progress than in Key Stages 3 and 4, and less of an emphasis on courses to develop students' academic skills. These aspects have recently been improved.
- Senior leaders have identified the need to provide more challenge in some of the academic courses to help more-able students achieve even more.
- Although good overall, students' progress is not consistent and a few more-able students do not achieve as much as they could. For example, achievement in science is outstanding in Years 8 and 9, and in language and literacy in Year 8. It is outstanding in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. However, progress in language and literacy in Years 10 and 11 is patchy. While most students make at least expected progress, a few do less well than this.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students' good progress is underpinned by good teaching in all subjects, age and ability groups. Almost all parents and carers agree that their children are taught well.
- Teaching is usually characterised by excellent relationships between staff and students. As a result, the atmosphere in most lessons is very positive, with everyone, including the students, determined that they should enjoy their work and learn well.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good, particularly in vocational studies. It focuses appropriately on improving students' key personal and social skills, and on preparing them for the future.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. As a result, they explain and demonstrate things well. Questioning is usually used effectively; staff quickly recognise when students have not fully understood and explain again but in a different way. An excellent example of this was seen in a practical horticulture lesson, when a teacher's outstanding explanations helped students to understand why their cuttings had not thrived.
- In most subjects, good opportunities are given to reinforce students' literacy and numeracy skills; for example, through reading texts and instructions, writing, and calculating weights and measures in science and technology lessons.
- Classrooms are welcoming, interesting and help students to learn. Support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is widely evident. The new science laboratories are professional and have revived students' interest in science. The hair and beauty room includes many features found in a professional salon, such as proper hair-washing facilities. The horticulture classroom is an outstanding mix of displays of photographs of students' work, important facts about growing and cultivating, and craft work, such as life-size trees and animals made from twigs. Classrooms have helpful, attractive displays such as words to support subjects and literacy, and students' past work, to encourage and inspire them.
- Staff give careful attention to individuals' particular needs to help them learn effectively. For example, brief rewards such as listening to music are sometimes given throughout lessons to students with autistic spectrum conditions to encourage them to complete their work. Special routines are worked out for students with problems such as extreme anxiety or very challenging behaviour to help them to stay calm and join in. Such strategies ensure that these students learn as well as their classmates and have equal opportunities to achieve well.
- In most lessons, students' behaviour and willingness to cooperate is exemplary. Most students listen well to each other's contributions, try hard and remain interested and actively involved throughout the lesson. Occasionally, however, students display inappropriate behaviour such as tapping the desk or whistling to one another, and this is not always tackled quickly or effectively enough by staff.
- Teaching is not outstanding because occasional weaknesses limit its effectiveness. These include learning objectives which are always identified at the start of lessons but then not mentioned again; little reference to the personal targets shown on students' individual learning plans, and insufficient guidance about what to do to improve students' work or skills, either during the lesson or in marking. Planning often does not show how the learning needs of students of different abilities are to be met. This sometimes results in pupils of all abilities doing the same work, which limits the achievement of the more-able.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is good in class and around the school. For most students, behaviour is excellent. Students are friendly and sociable with one another and adults, and polite and welcoming to visitors.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good in all subjects and age groups. They arrive to lessons on time and settle quickly. They listen to staff and help one another in class. On one occasion, for example, outstanding kindness and compassion were shown by two sixth formers towards a less-able student from another school when they gently reminded her how best to offer biscuits at break time. On another occasion, a student in Key Stage 4 exclaimed, 'Oh no! I feel for you, mate!' when he discovered that only one of his friend's plant cuttings had survived.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Staff spend a great deal of time on this, and work as well as possible with social services to protect students and keep them safe.
- Staff show great care and concern for students' well-being, for example, making sure that they have someone to talk to in confidence, and that they have suitable clothes should the need arise.
- Almost all parents and carers say that their child is well looked after at school. Students are overwhelmingly positive about the school's ability to keep them safe, for example, through internet-safety, health and safety, and personal, social and health education. This contributes very well to their personal development.
- Deliberately anti-social incidents, such as bullying and racism, occasionally occur, but are few and far between. Students have a very good understanding of all forms of bullying, and this is frequently reinforced at school. Staff, parents and carers say any such incidents are dealt with well by the school.
- Very occasionally, students deliberately choose to behave inappropriately, usually when staff do not tackle the behaviour head-on, so students do not have enough encouragement to stop. Some staff indicate inconsistent behaviour management as a concern in their inspection questionnaires.
- A number of students have challenging behaviour associated with their particular difficulties. This sometimes results in outbursts, which are dealt with very well, in line with the clear individual behaviour plans written for them. Teaching assistants work particularly well to calm these students and help them return to learning as quickly as possible.
- Pupils' attendance is below average but has risen considerably from 88.9% in the last reporting year to 91.4% this year. Improvement is continuing, particularly in the reduction of the number of persistent absentees. This improvement is due to a renewed drive to increase attendance, combined with the work of the family support worker.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has undergone considerable change in the past 15 months. After the new headteacher took up post, rigorous school self-evaluation identified a number of areas for improvement. These are directly reflected in high-quality improvement plans. To underpin improvement, a new staffing structure has been established to provide stronger leadership, management and provision throughout the school. Many staff said that they are now 'buzzing

with enthusiasm' and 'educational conversations' as the new organisation gets underway.

- The leadership of the sixth form has just been transferred to one of the assistant headteachers, responsible for 14 to 19 provision. The role of the subject leaders has been strengthened and incorporated into a 'middle leadership team', which, for the first time, is taking full responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in subjects. This gives these staff better opportunities to prepare for senior leadership roles in the future. Most of this team are new to their role this term and have yet to start carrying out their responsibilities. The senior leaders are providing close supervision and support as they get underway. Training has been given to help staff understand and work with the students' achievement information so that they can use it to plan for improvements. Some teaching assistants have been assigned to subjects to strengthen and develop subject specialism, alongside other improvements to the subjects and courses provided.
- The senior leaders are determined to improve achievement so that it is uniformly outstanding across all subjects and age groups. They have already planned a wide range of ways to improve achievement, particularly in English and literacy, and are systematically implementing them. These include training to help improve teaching and planning for progress; improved resources and facilities, such as new science laboratories, e-readers and reading schemes; and the introduction of more challenging courses and a new assessment system for the sixth form.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are rigorous and shared with the governing body. Support and training has been given to staff and to individuals, and targets set to improve their work and students' achievement.
- The school provides an excellent range of interesting, relevant subjects and courses. These promote students' positive attitudes to learning and lead to accreditation. They include the academic subjects of the National Curriculum, as appropriate to students' age, combined with complementary activities to support individuals, such as equine therapy. Work-related learning is an important subject in Key Stage 4. The sixth form offers many options, including sport and leisure, college links, and numerous short business-based projects.
- There is an increasing focus on preparing students for further education, employment, training and independent living as they grow older. This includes a good emphasis on the development of thinking skills, confidence and problem solving. The school is currently increasing the challenge of a few accredited courses to ensure that they are demanding enough, particularly for the more-able students.
- The use of alternative providers and the consortium arrangements allow the range of vocational and practical courses on offer to be extended. Pupils' attendance, safety, behaviour, and the impact of the provision on achievement are tracked and reported. Students make good progress on these. For example, one report from an alternative provider said that the student 'has had excellent attendance' and 'shows a willingness to learn by asking and answering questions'.
- The local authority adviser understands the school very well. He has been closely involved in discussions about students' achievement, the quality of provision, and the staff restructuring. Support for the school has been helpful and effective, for example, in carrying out paired observations of teaching with senior leaders to confirm their accuracy.
- Money received from the pupil premium is very well used to provide additional support for individuals. Students' needs are identified through detailed analysis, including, for example, those needing help for mental health issues, or those who are 'children in need'. The best way to help their achievement and well-being is then determined, and pupil premium money used to support this if appropriate. A proportion of the family worker's salary is paid for by the pupil

premium, in line with the proportion of students eligible for the grant. The Year 7 catch-up funding is used in a similar way to improve these students' achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Members of the governing body are experienced and knowledgeable. They work together and support each other very well, and say that this is an important part of their effectiveness.
- The governing body knows the school very well as its members are frequent, welcomed visitors. They understand the link between teachers' performance, students' achievement, pay and responsibility, and the need to support any underperforming teachers. They have been fully involved in school self-evaluation and the staff restructuring, and they oversee the school's finances capably.
- Governors receive professional, informative reports and clear improvement plans, and so are very well informed about the school's work, the quality of teaching and how well students do. They challenge senior leaders effectively on the basis of this information. All statutory duties are met, including those to safeguard students. They also understand the social and emotional challenges faced by many of the students, and support the school robustly in working with social services to keep students safe.

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

Unique reference number	122157
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	431591

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Coles
Headteacher	Denise Williams
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2011
Telephone number	01536 500030
Email address	ioffice@isebrook.northants-ecl.gov.uk

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