

Bicester Community College

Queen's Avenue, Bicester, OX26 2NS

Inspection dates

21–22 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- Leadership and management are good. They have successfully created an ethos in college that is nurturing, but challenging, and fully inclusive to all staff and students.
- Achievement is good. The impact of good leadership and management is seen in the rapid improvement of standards across all subject areas. Well-focused interventions have enabled some students to make outstanding progress.
- Good teaching helps students to develop the knowledge and skills they need for each subject. Teaching is lively and motivating. Exceptionally good relationships provide a positive climate for learning.
- The sixth form is good, providing post-16 students with a wide range of well-taught study paths to follow.
- Students' behaviour is good. They enjoy their lessons and eagerly involve themselves in the challenges they are set. They are courteous and friendly around college.
- Students feel safe. Their teachers know them exceptionally well. Students develop strong personal skills in this supportive environment.
- Senior leaders and managers set high expectations for students and staff. Strengths are accurately evaluated and areas requiring development tackled effectively.
- Other leaders are highly motivated and effective in ensuring good teaching and achievement.
- Using their wide range of skills, the interim executive board (IEB) provides good strategic leadership.
- Students speak proudly of their school, noting the many positive changes which have been made.
- Parents and carers have welcomed the rapid pace of change. They recognise the significant improvements that have been made to the leadership of the college and the quality of education provided.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Not all staff mark books in a way that will help students to improve their learning.
- Students are not always given sufficient opportunities to respond to the comments made by their teachers.
- Although attendance is average, a small minority of students fails to attend school regularly.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 40 lessons or part sessions. All of these were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with school staff, including senior and middle leaders, with students and the Chairman of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). They also held discussions with the headteacher from The Cooper School and a representative from the Parent Voice group.
- The inspection team scrutinised documents, including the school's improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the IEB and records relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 86 respondents who had completed the online questionnaire (Parent View) by the end of the inspection.
- Inspectors also took account of the views of 79 staff who responded to a questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lorna Brackstone, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional Inspector
Heidi Boreham	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary with a sixth form.
- The number of students on roll has fallen since the school was put into special measures.
- Most students are of White British heritage. A few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to the school for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and children from service families.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported by school action is average. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs is higher than average.
- The school meets the government's floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school uses Banbury and Bicester College, Bicester Bridge, the hospital service, Outreach, On Course, Discovery and Trax for alternative provision.
- The school has been supported by The Cooper School since April 2013. The substantive headteacher of this school stepped into the role of interim headteacher. In July 2013 his deputy headteacher took over the role of interim headteacher. He has recently been appointed as the substantive headteacher from September 2014.
- The school plans to become a sponsored academy in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching from good to outstanding by making sure that:
 - all teachers consistently use the format agreed for marking students' work
 - all students are given opportunities to respond to teachers' written comments so that they know how to improve their work
 - spelling and grammar mistakes are highlighted in every subject and students are required to amend these.
- Work with a very small group of families to promote the importance of regular attendance and ensure that no students are missing out on valuable learning time.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The turn-around in students' achievement during the past year is an impressive feature of the school. Current progress across year groups in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics, is consistently good and, at times, exceptional. For example, following an intensive nine-month programme to improve reading skills, students have made gains of up to three years.
- This contrasts significantly with the most recent published data which reflect a period in the history of the college when leadership and management were poor and teaching was inadequate. This combination resulted in students failing to make the progress and attain the standards they were capable of.
- Students' attainment on entry into Year 7 is variable but is generally below average. The current Year 11 joined the school with standards that were well below average. The poor provision they received in Key Stage 3 did nothing to raise these standards which were extremely low at the start of Key Stage 4. During this academic year the introduction of Saturday school, after-school catch-up sessions, timetable adjustments, Easter holiday revision opportunities, mentor sessions and academic review evenings have transformed the progress made by students.
- Forecast data from the school suggest that the percentage of students attaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, will match national averages. This is strongly supported by the students' workbooks and on-going assessments which indicate that exceptional progress has been made in Year 11. Students have made much faster progress than the national rate.
- Students' work shows that most are making better than expected progress in all other year groups. This is because specific interventions and a more structured reward system have been put in place to redress students' underperformance. Particular success has been made with a group of previously disengaged and underachieving Year 9 boys who have made a marked improvement on their prior achievement.
- In 2013 the gap between those Year 11 students who were in receipt of pupil premium funding and those who did not was wide. Despite a higher percentage of students eligible for this funding in the current Year 11, the gap has narrowed considerably in both English and mathematics. It has been reduced from one grade to a quarter of a grade.
- In Years 7 to 10 many of the students eligible for pupil premium are making better progress than their peers. This is because the rigorous tracking and checking systems make sure that dips in progress never go unnoticed. For example, it has been quickly noted that a small group of Years 8 and 9 students, eligible for pupil premium funding, require additional support in either English or mathematics to ensure they keep up with their peers.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is being used to fund early intervention reading work during the transition period from the feeder primary schools. It is enabling the school to close the gap earlier by providing specialist support.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form has made a significant improvement and is now good. This is as a result of improved leadership, better quality teaching and a more focused approach to the subjects offered.
- Those students who are educated off the school site make good and often exceptional progress. They are carefully tracked by the school, which enables them to have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The strong focus on the promotion of literacy skills across the curriculum is having a positive impact on the students' ability to adapt what they have learnt in English. For example, in history and geography lessons, students are encouraged to use a range of different words to summarise their findings. Reading skills are fostered well in English sessions where students enjoy a wide range of books.
- Most parents and carers who responded to Parent View considered that their children made good progress.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. In most subjects, including English and mathematics, it is typically good and sometimes outstanding. Students say that teachers 'now look happy, less stressed and relaxed'. This makes the students work hard because they do not want to let them down.
- Students, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, those for whom the pupil premium provides support, those who use English as an additional language and the most able, make rapid progress and achieve well.
- Students develop their skills well because teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. They explain new skills with clarity and purpose.
- By sharing the expectations of good external examination grades, students are motivated to do their best and strive for the highest outcomes. Students rise to the challenge when they are asked to be 'external examiners' in lessons and moderate each other's work.
- Teachers know their students well and plan lessons with a range of different activities that meet all of their needs. Careful attention is given to seating arrangements. The most vulnerable students sit near the teacher so that they do not slip 'under the radar'.
- Students feel confident about responding to teachers' questioning. This is because they are supported and encouraged to 'have a go'. They learn especially well when they are engaged in role play and involved in group discussions.
- Sixth form students enjoy good relationships with their teachers and respond well to the lively and interesting topics that are planned for them. They start to develop the study skills needed to achieve the higher grades and are supported well in choosing their future career paths.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to learning. They are well briefed and organised effectively to support individuals or to provide general support in lessons.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively across different subjects. However, opportunities to check the spelling and grammar of students' work are missed.
- Since the introduction of the target and marking policy, students have a clearer picture of what they need to do to improve their work. Most teachers mark books regularly. Nevertheless, a small minority of teachers has yet to adopt the agreed marking policy. Comments such as 'good' and 'fab' do not guide the students when they make the next steps in their learning.
- Most parents and carers who responded to the online inspection questionnaire, Parent View, felt that their children were taught well.

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

- Students consistently behave well in class and, at times, behaviour is exceptional. They concentrate well, respond enthusiastically to questions and persevere with tasks.
- Students' behaviour in and around the college is good. They are friendly, well-mannered and show courtesy and respect to each other.
- Students have a good understanding of different types of bullying and the detrimental effects of name-calling, particularly that based on race, sexuality or disability. They say there are occasional bullying incidents but they are clear about what to do if it occurs.
- Students feel that there is always an adult whom they can turn to if there is a problem and they know that their views are listened to.
- Students in the sixth form are sensible and mature young people. They make a strong contribution to the college as role models for the younger students.

- The student council develops effective leadership skills when members organise functions and discuss improvements to the college uniform.
- The college keeps its students safe and secure.
- Fixed exclusions have declined because leaders have taken action to support those students who were at risk.
- Attendance has improved for the vast majority of students. It is now broadly average. Nevertheless, the college is fully aware of a very small group of students who are persistently absent. This means that they are missing value learning time.
- The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire were positive about behaviour.

The leadership and management are good

- By providing clear, consistent and fair leadership, the interim headteacher and his acting deputy headteacher have been fundamental to the successful and swift steering of this college out of special measures.
- Nearly all staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that there had been a complete turn-around in the ethos and culture of the college. Most staff report that its transformation is exceptional. They consider it to be 'such a pleasure and privilege to be working here'. This is reflected in the return of those teachers who chose to leave the school prior to it going into special measures but are now happy to teach there.
- The school's leaders, managers and governors have demonstrated very well their capacity for improvement. They have swiftly made the changes necessary to ensure that all students receive the best possible education and achieve as well as they can.
- By quickly identifying teachers who needed to improve the quality of their work, the interim headteacher, supported by his leadership team, has eradicated inadequate teaching. This has been successfully achieved through regular lesson observations, scrutiny of workbooks and evaluations of students' progress. Robust measures to evaluate the performance of individual teachers have had a significant impact. A number of teachers have received support and have made good improvements. Others have decided to leave the school.
- The acting deputy headteacher has put an exceptionally secure system of identification and support in place to ensure that any student with special educational needs does not slip through unnoticed. There is an exceptional level of thoroughness to his approach. By developing a strong team to assist with this work, students are expertly supported with their differing needs.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders carefully track progress and ensure that any student experiencing difficulty gets help as soon as possible. The quality of teaching is closely monitored and variability quickly noted and rectified.
- The reorganisation of the way in which the subjects taught are now organised and presented to the students has enabled them to receive a broad and balanced range of opportunities. There is a consistent approach across the college to develop and promote the students' literacy and numeracy skills. There is a rich programme of activities for students outside of college hours providing opportunities for them to develop their skills and talents. Although they enjoy the competition between the house teams during charity events, students are proud of the money they raise for those less fortunate than themselves. Musical evenings, which include the appearance of the staff band, and the Christmas carol service are firm favourites in the social diary.
- The Parent View survey has been 'turned on its head' since last year. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to this did so positively and most agreed that the college is well led and managed.
- The headteacher and teaching staff of The Cooper School have provided high quality external support. They have supported improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, notably in

the subjects of sociology and chemistry. Involvement from the local authority has been through representation on the IEB.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Members of the IEB are led effectively and kept fully up to date by the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. They share a good level of expertise, are knowledgeable and well organised. The IEB has demonstrated their tenacity well in seeking out the most suitable sponsor for the school. In the appointment of the interim headteacher to the substantive post, members have demonstrated a deep understanding of the needs of the college and excellent vision for its future development. Members are kept well informed through visits to the college, meetings with senior leaders and presentations from middle managers. As a result, they have a clear understanding of the strengths of the college but know that it is still 'not perfect'. They ask challenging questions and have a clear overview of the quality of teaching. Members monitor the spending of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding closely to ensure eligible students make gains in their achievement and personal development. There are rigorous procedures to safeguard students and ensure their health and safety. All statutory requirements are met.

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	123233
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	432558

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	989
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Bob Wintringham
Headteacher	Tony Rushworth
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 December 2012
Telephone number	01869 243331
Fax number	01869 246396
Email address	office.4030@bicester-cc.ocnmail.net

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