



Prospect College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110106
LEA Reading LEA
Inspection number 278373
Inspection dates 14 September 2005 to 15 September 2005
Reporting inspector Roy Blatchford HMI

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

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Type of school | Secondary | School address | Cockney Hill |
| School category | Foundation | | Tilehurst |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 | | Reading RG30 4EX |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01189590466 |
| Number on roll | 1523 | Fax number | 01189504172 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mr Wilton Wills |
| Date of previous inspection | 2 November 1999 | Headteacher | Ms Deborah Ajose |

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|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of five inspectors over a period of two days.

Description of the school

Prospect College is a multi cultural, co-educational foundation school situated on the outskirts of Reading town centre. It is larger than average in size, with 1623 students. The school receives children from a large and diverse catchment area. The school was formed in 1985 by the amalgamation of two schools on one large site, and in 2001 absorbed students from a neighbouring school which closed. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above that found nationally. Many students enter the school with levels of literacy and numeracy that are lower than average. There are currently 260 teachers and support staff employed at the school; in recent years there has been a high level of turnover amongst teachers. Around a quarter of families responded to the questionnaires circulated prior to the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The school judges itself to be ineffective overall, and inspectors agree. Over the past four years students' standards and achievement have been well below those found nationally, although results in the 2005 Key Stage 3 tests indicate welcome improvements. Inspectors also agree that the quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall. There has been a marked deterioration since the last inspection in 1999. The school does not offer satisfactory value for money. The school provides an adequate curriculum. The students' personal development and the way in which they are cared for and guided are satisfactory, with some strengths. Since April 2005, under the resolute leadership of the acting headteacher, the school has rapidly identified its own weaknesses and strengths. The school's own evaluation document is honest, sharply evaluative and rightly self-critical. Acting upon identified shortcomings, the staff and governors have, in a short space of time, demonstrated a strong capacity to improve, and have begun to address with determination many chronic inadequacies. However, the impact on improving standards and teaching quality is not yet sufficiently evident. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the pupils' standards of achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. The school also requires significant improvement in relation to its sixth form.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The school judges the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form to be inadequate and the inspection confirms this. Students' achievement and overall standards in their work are inadequate. The quality of provision is inadequate although measures are in place to ensure that more level 2 courses are available to meet the wide range of ability in the sixth form, and to reduce the number of small groups. Collaboration with local schools and other external links are helping to broaden and enrich provision. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is inadequate overall and is inconsistent across departments. Systems for monitoring progress have lacked rigour, resulting in poor retention rates between Years 12 and 13. Intervention strategies have not secured adequate academic development and standards. However, measures have been introduced to improve these aspects, such as better monitoring and classroom observation. Students feel that their new accommodation provides a stimulating learning environment which will enhance the reputation of the sixth form locally. Students articulate their views clearly and feel confident about their futures.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to improve the standards and progress students make, including in the sixth-form, the headteacher and the governors should:* eradicate unsatisfactory

teaching and ensure that good classroom practice is shared with all staff* raise teachers' expectations of what the students can achieve* focus middle managers' attention on the importance of regular assessment to raise students' attainment* ensure that the recently introduced systems for the monitoring of teaching quality and students' progress are effective

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The school judges students' achievement and standards in their work to be inadequate; the inspection confirms this. For each year group in Key Stage 3, attainment on entry was below average with a significant number of students achieving below Level 4 at the end of primary school. In English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 in 2004 a significant proportion of students was absent from the tests, and in English a high proportion failed to reach the minimum threshold. Only a small proportion achieved Level 6 and above. In all three core subjects the gap between the school's results and national averages has widened over the last three years. Value added measures indicate a decline in overall standards from 2003 and are significantly lower than the national average. Girls do better than boys but still underachieve. Of ethnic groups, those classified as 'white' do less well than others and attain significantly lower than average. However, in the most recent tests of 2005, there have been improvements in achievement at Key Stage 3, notably in English. At Key Stage 4 standards are well below national averages and fall far short of the school's targets. In 2005 about one student in four succeeded in gaining five or more of the higher A* - C grades at GCSE. The school's value added score at Key Stage 4 is significantly lower than that found nationally. The inspection confirms the school's judgement that achievement and standards in the sixth form are inadequate. The school's overall average points score per candidate in 2004 is much lower than that found nationally and lower than that for 2003. For Year 13, the percentage of entries gaining grades A - E in GCE and VCE was much lower than the national figure. Value was added in some subjects but was below average overall. The AS results are marginally better than the A Level ones, but both are lower than the school achieved last year and those achieved by students nationally. In relation to sixth form attainment by exam type and subject, a high proportion of students are unclassified and do not attain a grade E. Too few students attain the highest grades.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students' behaviour in classes and around the school is broadly satisfactory and the legacy of poor attitudes to study is beginning to change. The school has recognised the need to combat the frequent low-level disruption to lessons which impedes students' learning. Teachers are gradually raising their expectations of students' behaviour and beginning to insist on clear classroom routines. Consultation with staff and students is starting to inform the way in which the school

can promote a culture of rewarding positive behaviour. The students recognise that things are beginning to change, and value their House Points system. Bullying and racial harassment are not a major concern, and students know that if they have a problem staff are swift to take action. Strengths of the school are the cordial relationships between students and staff, and the way in which students of different ages and from different backgrounds mix happily together in the playgrounds and dining-hall. Movement around the large site is generally orderly, supported by vigilant staff supervision; occasional incidents of unpleasant and boisterous behaviour are managed well. Attendance has been unsatisfactory, but the school's systematic approach to tracking and responding promptly to absence has led to good improvements in levels of attendance; these are now in line with national expectations. The school has introduced an Inclusion Learning Centre on site which has reduced successfully the number of fixed term exclusions. Students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is satisfactory, although there are missed opportunities for students' spiritual development. Learners are encouraged to adopt safe practices and the extent to which students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles is improving. Soft drink machines are being phased out, and healthy eating is being encouraged with salads being made available to all. Through initiatives such as the Oxford Road collaborative project, the Ranikhet Extended School, Technology Days and the web site development for primary schools, the students make some significant contributions to the community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Inspectors confirm the school's view that teaching and learning are inadequate. Teaching in too many lessons fails to capture the students' interest and they are therefore not motivated to do well. Many lessons are unchallenging and lacking in sparkle. Students sit passively and learn what they are told to learn without engaging in any meaningful way. In such lessons, low level disruptions are common and students look bored, although they are not disaffected. One student told inspectors about a small minority of exciting lessons where 'teachers are passionate about what they teach us', and contrasted this to many other lessons where 'being stuck in front of a video is the most exciting thing that happens to us'. Although inspectors saw examples of lessons where teachers made imaginative uses of resources and structured learning skilfully, this is not what students receive as a daily diet. Display of students' work is largely unimaginative and does not fire students with the enthusiasm to learn. Many teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of students' basic working habits and routines. In recent months, the drive to improve teaching and learning, and thereby raise standards of achievement, has been at the heart of what the school is trying to do. There are more structured opportunities to share good practice within departments, and the lessons learnt from checks on the quality of teaching are beginning to be used as a tool to help teachers improve their craft in the classroom. The procedures for checking how well students are making progress are currently inadequate. Parents and students commented critically on this aspect of the school's provision. Although

marking has improved, its quality is still inconsistent, and written comments do not help students to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Consequently, their knowledge of their own learning is poor. The use of data to help teachers plan effectively and set appropriately challenging targets is in its infancy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of students across the age ranges. The school is rightly confident that recent changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum should result in it being better matched to learners' needs. More able students will be able to start GCSE courses a year early, extending their time in the sixth form to three years and making it more possible for them to obtain higher level qualifications. The needs of less able students are met as a result of greater attention now being given to improving skills of literacy and numeracy. The school has an effective programme to evaluate the impact of these changes on students' achievements. Students at Key Stage 4 appreciate the wide range of options available. The school works well to ensure a real level of choice, reflecting students' different needs and aspirations. Students receive good guidance from staff when making these choices. A key feature of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is the provision of more work-related opportunities, including a week's work experience for all Year 10 students and, for some, extended work experience of one day per week. The school has received a Sports Mark Award as a result of its good sports provision, and staff emphasise the importance of exercise and adopting healthy life-styles particularly through the physical education curriculum. The adoption of healthy and safe life-styles is reinforced within the citizenship programme which raises students' awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol, smoking and drugs. There is strong take up in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Participation in these activities helps students to develop personal and social skills. The Learning Resource Centre provides an attractive environment for study at lunchtimes and after school. Enrichment activities such as Enterprise Days, House Competitions and the Curriculum Enhancement Week help to motivate students and add to their enjoyment of school whilst teaching skills of enterprise and working in a team. All students develop an awareness of economic and financial matters through the school's citizenship programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's care, guidance and support for students are satisfactory. Care for students is a strength. Vulnerable students have a dedicated area where they feel safe; the majority of these students feel confident enough to make a successful transition to the main school when the time is right. The positive effect of partnership with parents, the sensitive placing of students in tutor groups, weekend courses to raise self-esteem, and the buddy system are examples of good quality care. Transition procedures for Years 7, 9 and 11 are effective and valued by the students. They have access to The Body Zone for sexual or health concerns and counsellors are available to support students in need. Students know that if they need help it is always there. The school

recognises the need for improved guidance and support which focuses on learning and academic progress. Although data on students is collected and is available to staff, it is not yet systematically related to outcomes. However, pastoral secretaries have now been appointed to enable action on this aspect of the school's practice. The school believes that its links with support services, particularly for the most vulnerable are good, and the inspection confirmed this view. The questionnaires completed by parents indicate confidence in what the school has now set out to do, including to improve communication with families, to improve homework, and to tackle the small minority of students who display anti-social behaviour.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school judges its leadership and management to be satisfactory overall, and inspectors agree with this view. The school has experienced significant change at senior leadership level over the past four years, leading to a lack of common purpose among the staff. There have been inconsistencies in middle management, and ineffective practice at senior level, failing to hold teachers to account for the low standards achieved by the students. Performance management procedures have not been harnessed effectively. Since April 2005, the acting headteacher has been unwavering in her approach to arrest the school's decline. She has challenged a number of long-standing issues, for example the irregular marking of students' books, which have led to a climate of teachers having low expectations of students. Her leadership and clarity of vision are valued by all. Students respect her drive to challenge their casual attitudes and put a focus on promoting a culture of learning within the school. The headteacher has orchestrated a senior team with clear roles and responsibilities; all staff are increasingly aware of their accountabilities and the need to respond to them. Senior and middle managers have in the past not monitored and evaluated their work with sufficient rigour, nor have they set appropriately challenging targets for students. New and suitable systems have been introduced; staff are confident in these and are working hard to ensure improved standards in classrooms. External advice has been harnessed where appropriate, alongside some effective in-house training. Accommodation is variable, with parts of the school providing a bleak environment for learning. In contrast, the sixth-form centre provides state-of-the-art teaching facilities, and the very good provision for computers is valued highly by the students. The school's action planning for the future is well judged, with middle managers being held to account regularly for the raising of attainment. A group of senior governors has been instrumental in ensuring that in recent months the trends of under-performance have been identified and challenged robustly. They have worked constructively with the local education authority to ensure proper financial planning for the future. There is a clear determination from the governing body to work with the staff to effect urgent change in order to provide the students with the education they deserve.

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Inspection judgements

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|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall | 16-19 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 4 | 4 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 3 | 3 |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage | NA | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | Yes | Yes |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No | No |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 4 | 4 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 | 4 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 4 | |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 4 | 4 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 | 3 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review | 3 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected | Yes | Yes |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy | |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise | Yes |
| Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse | Yes |
| Learners are educated about sexual health | Yes |
| The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe | |
| Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements | Yes |
| Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place | Yes |
| Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism | Yes |
| Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them | Yes |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution | |
| Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships | Yes |
| Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community | Yes |
| The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being | |
| There is provision to promote learners' basic skills | Yes |
| Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams | Yes |
| Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form | Yes |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy | Yes |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the help you provided to the inspection team when we visited Prospect College on 14th and 15th September. We enjoyed meeting many of you, discussing your work and the school, and we hope you find the final report interesting to read. I thought you might like to read a brief summary of the findings from the inspection.

The inspectors agree with the school's own view that standards achieved by most students are not good enough at the moment. Many of you do not make satisfactory progress with your studies in your time at school. The inspection team recognises that you are not receiving effective teaching on a regular basis, and that in many lessons the activities planned for you are not stimulating.

On the positive side, we were impressed by the way you get on well with each other. The teachers and the support staff work hard to provide good care and guidance. You clearly value the range of extra-curricular activities which are on offer, and you make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community. We agree with you that Ms Ajose is trying to improve standards in the school, and is reminding you constantly of your responsibilities. In particular, a number of you need to improve your listening skills, stop interrupting the teachers when they are explaining things to you, and make much better use of your time in class. We have given the school what is called a 'Notice To Improve' and some recommendations on the most important issues that need to be tackled. The governing body, headteacher and staff have a clear determination to give you the education you deserve, and inspectors will be returning in a year's time to check on the progress the school has made.