



Ellesmere College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 130371
Local Authority Leicester City
Inspection number 293639
Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007
Reporting inspector Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Ellesmere Road
School category	Community		Leicester
Age range of pupils	11–19		LE3 1BE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0116 2894224
Number on roll (school)	258	Fax number	0116 2894121
Number on roll (6th form)	59		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Chris Evans
		Principal	Andrew Large
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	28 February –1 March 2007	293639

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ellesmere College is a secondary school for students* with moderate learning difficulties. An increasingly significant minority have a range of more complex needs, including specific learning, autistic spectrum, sensory and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The great majority come from the City of Leicester, with a small number travelling in from the wider county area. Their social backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of this catchment area and the proportion entitled to free school meals is above average. Around a quarter of students come from ethnic minority backgrounds and most of these require support in their use of English as a second language. There are an unusually large number of students in the care of the local authority. There are nearly twice as many boys as girls. Over a third of students arriving in Year 7 have transferred from mainstream primary schools and most of the small number admitted in later years arrive through the same route. The college has achieved a number of awards, including, for example, Leading Edge Partnership Programme, Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM), Investor in People and Healthy School status and has just gained recognition as a Specialist Sports College.

*This report will follow the college's practice of referring to all pupils as students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Ellesmere College is an outstanding school that has sustained and built on the many strengths identified at the last inspection. All adults and students have a clear commitment to do their best, and they work exceptionally well together to achieve that ideal. The key to the college's success is its unfailing focus on the needs of individual students and its flexibility and adaptability in meeting them. As a result, staff have developed a first rate curriculum that, together with outstanding teaching, enables students to make excellent progress in learning, leading to their outstanding achievements by the time they leave. Students' overwhelming enthusiasm for virtually everything they do is a clear indication of the enjoyment that they gain from attending the college. Many of those who have had previous unhappy experiences of school elsewhere are very straightforward in explaining how differently they now feel about school and learning. One girl spoke for many when she said, 'I felt like a nothing before I came. I love it here, and now believe I can make something of my life.' Students are encouraged to be ambitious for themselves, and she, like a number of older students who talked confidently to inspectors, expressed clear and realistic plans for her future, which included a specific career choice. The possibility of achieving this is made all the more possible by the very good results that students achieve across an extremely wide range of accredited courses and activities, including GCSE and vocational qualifications.

Students' pastoral and welfare needs are met exceptionally well by outstanding care, guidance and support. The college works in extremely effective partnership with many agencies and individual professionals to meet students' particular needs and plan for their future. Parents express considerable appreciation of the excellent work that the college's bilingual manager and parent link worker do to help them to be active partners in their children's education. Students consequently feel safe and secure, able to share any concerns they might have and confident that they will get the appropriate help and guidance they require from staff. This nurturing atmosphere enables them to make outstanding progress in their personal and social development. The college treats them as individuals, always looking for ways to celebrate their achievements, so that they know they really matter and feel valued.

Teachers and their very able assistants work in highly successful teams to provide relevant and very well focused learning opportunities. However, younger students are not always sufficiently involved in setting targets and assessing their own learning. Lessons are lively and purposeful, made fun by the imaginative approaches staff employ, and satisfying because of the superb quality of relationships that exist throughout the college. As a result, students are highly motivated and respond exceptionally well. They learn very successfully and achieve impressive results, despite standards being well below average due to students' learning difficulties.

The college's success is the result of outstanding leadership from the principal and his consummately professional senior colleagues, all of whom lead by example. Management at every level of the college is impressive, because all staff are encouraged to feel accountable for the impact of their own work and are helped to make a real

contribution to the college's effectiveness. Administrative staff play an increasingly responsible role in managing data and analysing whole-college issues, based on their very good relationships with students, parents and visiting services. Governors function as equal partners, providing outstanding support in strategic planning and appropriate challenge in relation to evaluating performance. The college has a realistic and accurate view of its strengths and knows what it has to do to be even more effective. It collects a considerable amount of information to inform this self-knowledge, although this is not always presented in its most useful form. The college has an outstanding capacity to improve further given its record of consistent and sustained improvement and students' outstanding achievement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision for post-16 students is outstanding, because it focuses very successfully on providing challenging and relevant learning opportunities for its students, whom staff always think of as young adults. Students are provided with excellent teaching, guidance and support in completing accredited courses and developing the necessary skills to successfully access college placements, work experience and employment opportunities. Staff work very effectively to help students towards being extremely well prepared for adult life and transition into their post-school settings. Spending time at Hill View, the college's residential facility for, typically, four days and nights, and earlier support on developing their capability to travel independently, make a significant contribution to developing students' necessary independence. Staff have very high expectations of students and they respond accordingly with maturity and determination. As with other parts of the college, students from other settings benefit enormously from joining the Ellesmere students in their studies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve younger students more in negotiating their own targets and assessing the progress they make towards achieving them.
- Organise and collate more efficiently the wealth of data already collected, so that they demonstrate more clearly the effectiveness of innovative practice across the college and better inform planning for its continuous improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement is outstanding. Although standards are well below average because of the nature and extent of learning difficulties across the school, the great majority of students make excellent progress. For many, this is in stark contrast to their own earlier expectations, because the college has 'rescued' them from earlier learning failure and low self-esteem, and given them a sense of worth and capability. This is the direct

result of all students being taught an outstanding curriculum exceptionally well and being provided with very well focused pastoral support.

The college has an increasingly sophisticated approach in using assessment information to show clearly how individuals and groups of students perform in relation to the challenging targets they are set. The data show that the great majority of students reach these targets successfully and provide explanations for the few who do not. Analysis demonstrates that there are no significant differences in the performance of different groups, for example girls versus boys or students using English as a second language.

High expectations are clearly reflected in the exceptional results that students of all abilities achieve across the extremely wide range of externally accredited courses provided for them. These cover the full spectrum of appropriate academic and life skills, show particular strengths in practical subjects and confirm the importance and value of flexibility in adapting the courses studied to meet the changing needs of groups. In this way, results improve year on year and students are very well prepared for the next stage of their continued learning in college or elsewhere in training or employment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students thrive in the college's positive atmosphere and respond very well to its 'can do' culture. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. This is due to the wealth of opportunities the college provides them for reflection, consideration of the rights and needs of others, development of their own independence and personal responsibility and an understanding and appreciation of diversity in their own community and beyond. The sensitive balance of support and challenge achieved by the college closely reflects the requirements of the Every Child Matters agenda. This results in students valuing their education. Their outstanding achievements prepare them extremely well for adult life. Consequently, attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. By the same token, the college's highly effective approach to managing difficult behaviour, developed during a previous period when there was an influx of students with significant emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, has resulted in behaviour now being excellent. Students know about how to make healthy choices in eating and how to stay fit and well. Their enthusiastic participation in physical education and sports activities is valuable in this respect. Students are aware of the need for personal safety and know what to do if they feel threatened or insecure in any way. They express clear confidence in the effective support and response provided by staff in such circumstances. The active student council impressively fulfils its role as a consultative body, exemplified by its members' prominent role in the recent appointment of the new college principal. This active involvement in the life of the college community provides a good role model for all the other students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching has significant strengths that address the needs of all students and ensure the excellent learning of all. A wide range of teaching techniques and materials, developed and applied to meet the diversity of need in college, are used very effectively to make learning exciting for everyone and to engage students' interest and involvement. There is a very strong and productive emphasis on developing students' reading and writing skills right across the curriculum. Teachers are enthusiastic and plan very carefully to ensure that everyone is included in, and motivated by, their learning. Teaching assistants, many of whom have particular skills and responsibilities, work exceptionally well in partnership with teachers to develop high quality relationships with students, establish a very positive learning climate and provide excellent support and encouragement. Students benefit from the great variety of approaches employed and respond well to working collaboratively in pairs and small groups, which serves them very well for life after school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it is very broad in scope and highly relevant to all students' needs in its focus. Extremely effective auditing and planning ensure that all aspects of the full range of National Curriculum subjects are taught. This leads naturally to all students being able to fully demonstrate the extent of their learning in the extensive range of accredited awards at the end of Year 11, beyond into the sixth form and then on to college for the majority. Many valuable initiatives, such as the Ellesmere Learning Enhancement Curriculum (ELEC) and the bicycle maintenance workshop, have been developed in response to the identified needs of particular groups, so that all students can make the best use of their time in the college. The curriculum is enriched by an extraordinary range of opportunities. There is a prodigious list of lunchtime and after school clubs, residential visits abroad and in this country (students as young as Year 7 stay at Hill View), creative use of the community and its facilities and many visitors to college such as artists and musicians. Leading Edge status has also enabled supported student exchanges in both directions between Ellesmere College and a large number of other schools, so that the individuals involved experience a 'bespoke' programme of learning fitted to their particular requirements. The extensive programme of work related learning, sensitively selected and supported work experience placements and vocational training opportunities provides students with an awareness of the demands and realities of the workplace and prepares them exceptionally well for their life beyond school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Arrangements to safeguard students' welfare are extremely thorough and this means that those who are most vulnerable or at risk are given high quality personal attention. Child protection arrangements and those to ensure everyone's health and safety are rigorous and effective. The pastoral guidance that individuals receive is extensive and of very high quality and is a key factor in producing outstanding personal development. Academic guidance is, though, less effective, because not all students are involved in setting or are fully aware of their own targets, so that they are limited in the opportunities they have to monitor or assess their own performance. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of the care and education their children receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Very high quality leadership and management, including the work of the governing body, are the driving forces behind the college's excellent provision and students' outstanding achievements. Outstanding leadership by senior members of the college and exceptional shared management across all aspects of its work by everyone with any sort of assigned responsibility ensures that students get the best possible deal and resources are used to best effect. The new principal has a clear and appropriately celebratory view of everything that is done well and has already developed a strategic vision for how the college can move on to the next level. He knows that the impressive tradition of nurturing potential through highly effective performance management and resultant, well planned professional development and training opportunities ensures best value from its staff. His and his colleagues' monitoring is extremely thorough, although the wealth of data collected is not consistently presented in its most useful form.

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we came to visit your college. We were very impressed by your behaviour, attitudes to work and willingness to talk so honestly about how you feel. Clearly, many of you think that Ellesmere has made a big difference to your life and has helped you to feel very much more positive about yourself and your future chances.

We agree with you that your college is outstanding for a number of reasons.

- Your achievement and your personal development are excellent.
- You receive very high quality support and are always treated and respected as individuals.
- All staff work impressively well together to give you the best possible education, and the teaching you receive is outstanding.
- Staff have very high expectations of you and you respond enthusiastically.
- You are provided with an exceptional range of exciting and interesting things to do.
- Your new principal, his senior managers and governors all lead and manage the school exceptionally well.

We identified two things that could help to make your college even better.

- Some of you could be more involved in negotiating your own targets and assessing how well you are getting on.
- Staff could organise better all the information they collect to plan for the future.

However, the most important thing is that you continue to be as cooperative and enthusiastic as you were when we saw you. You made us realise that if you think you can do something then you will be able to.