

New College Leicester

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131945
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	295460
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	793
6th form	61
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Andy Brecon board
Principal	Jane Brown
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2006
School address	Glenfield Road Leicester LE3 6DN
Telephone number	0116 2318500
Fax number	0116 2322286

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

New College serves a catchment that has significant levels of social, economic and educational disadvantage. Over the last five years there has been a dramatic reduction in the number on roll. The college is now smaller than average. Students come from a range of different backgrounds, but most are White British. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are significantly higher than average. There have been very high levels of turbulence in recent years both in staffing and in the student population. Half of the teaching staff has joined the college within the last year.

In order to address long standing problems, the college has been in receipt of considerable support from the local authority (LA) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in recent years. The executive principal was appointed in December 2005 and the principal started in January 2006. The college has been governed by an interim executive board (IEB) for the last two years.

At the last inspection the college was given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement was required in relation to all areas of the college's work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The college has been transformed since the last inspection. All areas of weakness have been significantly strengthened. New College is a rapidly improving school with some emerging strengths. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

Achievement is satisfactory. Sweeping improvements in teaching, underpinned by a better curriculum, mean that students now make satisfactory progress in lessons and over time. Nonetheless, the legacy of poor provision and previously inadequate progress means that, in many cases, the standards of students' work, particularly those in Year 11, are well below the levels expected. Although there were notable increases in the test and examination results in 2006, standards of attainment for all age groups were significantly lower than national average figures.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and much is good. Since the last inspection most of the inadequate teaching has been eradicated. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased significantly, although there is not yet enough high quality teaching to address the legacy of underachievement. Considerable work on the curriculum, particularly in developing schemes of work and strengthening short-term planning, has ensured that it is satisfactory. However, the college recognises that it has not yet done enough to ensure that students have the essential skills that will equip them more fully for the next stage in their education and for later life. Some aspects of provision, including citizenship, careers education and personal, social and health education (PSHE), remain underdeveloped.

The college is a calm and orderly community that provides good care, guidance and support for its students. It is in a strong position to cope with day-to-day challenges and ongoing turbulence. Since the last inspection there has been dramatic improvement in students' behaviour, attitudes, punctuality and attendance. Personal development and well-being are satisfactory, although many students do not adopt healthy lifestyles. The students generally have positive attitudes. Around the school and in lessons their behaviour is satisfactory and sometimes good.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The college's rapid transformation has been the result of excellent senior leadership, rigorous self-evaluation, the hard work of staff and their willingness to embrace changes. Furthermore, much care has been taken to ensure that all the recent improvements are sustainable. This has been achieved through a combination of good appointments, effective professional development, the implementation of clear policies and robust systems, and judicious financial planning. In this respect, the IEB has played a key role in guiding the college's recovery and development. There is outstanding capacity for further improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

At the time of the last inspection the sixth form provision was unacceptably poor. The college acted swiftly and decisively to address the problems by implementing some radical short-term

solutions and by promoting the strategic development of sixth form provision across west Leicester. There is in place for September 2007 a suitable range of pathways and options for sixth form students, based on a federation of schools and colleges. Recruitment for these courses is soundly based on proper guidance and matched to students' attainment.

The current sixth form provision is intentionally narrow and meets the needs of the few students on roll in Year 12. However, with just five courses the sixth form curriculum provides only limited choice and breadth. Although a few opportunities have been developed for students to take responsibility in their community, for example as mentors or in fund raising for charity, there are too few wider enrichment opportunities. In this respect the curriculum is inadequate.

Sixth form teaching is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress in lessons and over time, and proper systems are in place to track their progress. Sixth form students are given suitable support and guidance and are well cared for. Their personal development is satisfactory. The strategic leadership of the sixth form is good. Day-to-day management is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the relentless drive to raise standards and improve achievement by increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching.
- Ensure that students of all ages develop the essential personal and academic skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being.
- Strengthen weaker aspects of the curriculum, including the sixth form and provision for citizenship, careers education and PSHE.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards remain well below average across the college, but progress has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. There is no significant difference in the progress made by different groups of students.

The Year 9 national test results in 2006 demonstrated that standards were very low, especially in mathematics. Even when taking into consideration their low starting points, the students' progress was below average in English and science and exceptionally low in mathematics. The picture in Key Stage 4 was worse still. The outcomes of the examinations for Year 11 students were well below average. For example, only around one in six students achieved five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics. In terms of the students' progress, this placed the college in the bottom one per cent of all schools in the country.

However, results in national tests and examinations only tell the college's story up until the summer of 2006. Since then, significant improvements in the quality of teaching have accelerated the students' progress. Achievement is now satisfactory. Through a very good intervention programme, reading skills have risen significantly, especially in Key Stage 3. The college's robust and accurate assessment information indicates that standards are rising and that progress towards its challenging targets is satisfactory. This is borne out in lessons. Observations by the college's staff and the inspection team confirm that students are making satisfactory and often good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The college has worked hard to raise students' aspirations and expectations, and all aspects of personal development have been strengthened since the last inspection. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour and punctuality and attendance are vastly improved, reflecting the fact that students are happy and feel safe at school.

The staff, students, parents and local community recognise that the culture and climate of the college have been transformed. Students say that the college is unrecognisable compared to how it was a year ago. One said, 'Teachers smile, talk to me, and listen to what I have to say,' another that, 'We have to work hard but lessons are good fun. I enjoy coming to college now and I feel safe and well cared for.'

The turnaround, in terms of the more positive behaviour and attitudes to learning, has been achieved as a result of the college's unequivocal expectations, high levels of staff supervision, and improvements in teaching. Behaviour is satisfactory and often good. However, at breaks and lunchtimes, some students are too boisterous.

For a significant number of students, low levels of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), and the legacy of underachievement hamper their employment and academic aspirations. Too many students are ill equipped for the next stage of their education or for adult life. However, the recently introduced work experience programmes and careers guidance are positively raising expectations.

There is a sense of excitement in the college. Students appreciate the changes and many want to be a part of the improvement. A week of anti-bullying activities has left students alert to and able to take action if they see or experience bullying. The work of the college council is a major thrust and a vehicle for involving students in the decision making processes. Their 'can do' approach is heartening and is engaging ever larger numbers of the college community. The college is striving to develop a greater awareness and concern for healthy eating, but many students do not eat healthily, partly because they are very unhappy about the food that is available to them in the college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching has improved significantly and is satisfactory overall. There is much greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. Classrooms enjoy a positive climate for learning, with good relationships between adults and students; work is properly structured and guided by clear learning objectives; accurate assessment information ensures that work is generally pitched at the right level; and, students' progress is routinely checked with regular marking. These wholesale improvements ensure that students make satisfactory progress in their lessons and over time. Students with learning difficulties receive appropriate intervention and support and so make satisfactory progress.

Increasingly, students are prepared to collaborate positively in their learning. They work productively in pairs or small groups, volunteer answers, and are indignant when others disrupt their lessons. At times, when teaching is sharply focused and lively, and when marking is carefully diagnostic, the students make more rapid gains. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased significantly since the last inspection, although still not enough to redress the legacy of underachievement. Some weaker teaching still persists, but the college is working hard to develop the effectiveness of teachers who need additional support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is well organised and meets the learners' needs. The increasingly wide choice of vocational courses, including those in the sixth form, provide suitable pathways for students and encourage young people to remain in education. However, at present the sixth form curriculum is intentionally narrow.

Much has been done to strengthen the curriculum, including the development of schemes of work in all subjects and a renewed focus on improving literacy across the curriculum. The provision for careers guidance, citizenship, sex education and PSHE is developing, but is not yet coordinated well enough to ensure adequate coverage. The college recognises these weaknesses.

The curriculum is extended and enhanced by a greater range of extra-curricular opportunities and by a large number of revision and 'catch-up' sessions. Students are responding by increasing participation in these, especially in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Staff know students well and are highly committed to ensuring that they are all well cared for and receive high quality guidance and support. The various support programmes, such as those for vulnerable students, and other intervention strategies are regularly reviewed in order to better meet students' academic and emotional needs. The steps taken to support students with behavioural or learning difficulties or disabilities are working well. Evidence for this is seen in lessons and in the reduced rates of exclusion. College staff constantly monitor levels of attendance and punctuality and they work closely with parents, students and outside agencies where problems persist. The college works hard to improve home-school communication and is constantly seeking ways to engage more closely with parents.

Good use is currently being made of available data to monitor and track academic progress and students' personal development and to evaluate how effectively resources are used and how staff are deployed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The leadership of the principal and executive principal is outstanding. The two principals have been the architects of the college's rapid transformation. It is their vision and determination that have changed the culture of the college and the quality of its provision. They have set clear expectations for staff and students, and have been uncompromising, but fair, in implementing the necessary changes. The principals have been well supported by a very strong and effective team of senior leaders and a developing team of middle managers.

Many of the improvements have been realised by new appointments, but much has also been achieved by the existing staff. Teachers who were beleaguered and whose morale was low have been given new confidence and the motivation to work hard. This has been achieved by successfully establishing a positive climate and a good working environment where students are happy to learn and teachers are able to teach effectively. In recent years the college has been in receipt of significant additional resources to support its improvement. Since the last inspection this additional funding has been well directed. External support has been very well managed and targeted, so that the expertise has focused effectively on improving key areas of weakness.

Robust and honest self-evaluation has been central to the college's improvement. Rigorous systems for checking the quality of teaching and all aspects of provision have identified strengths and guided developments. Weaknesses have been quickly and effectively addressed. New systems, including effective line management, ensure that middle managers are properly supported and held to account, and that improvements are sustainable. Support and training for staff at all levels have been very good. The cohesiveness of staff has ensured that developments have been consistently and effectively implemented.

The IEB has played a key role in guiding the college's recovery and improvement. The chair of the IEB has led its work expertly, and with suitable rigour, and has ensured that the board has developed its role as a critical friend.

The dramatic decline in student numbers has necessitated a massive reduction in staffing and other costs. The skilful and professional management of these cuts has ensured that the budget has been properly balanced, that provision has been strengthened, and that good staff morale has been fostered.

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Annex A

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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

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	4	
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	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

4 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of New College Leicester, Leicester, LE3 6DN

- Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by how helpful you were, and the sensible way that you all spoke with us. Many of you told us how much better the college is, and how much you appreciate the improvements. The most obvious improvements are in:
- the whole learning environment of the college and the curriculum that it provides
- the quality of teaching and the progress that you make in lessons
- your attendance and punctuality, behaviour and attitudes to learning.

At the last inspection, just over a year ago, every area of the college still needed significant improvement. The necessary changes have been made and New College can now proudly claim to be a satisfactory school. However, none of this would have been achieved without the hard work of the staff and your cooperation and efforts. It is also clear that the leadership of Mrs Brown and Mr Kershaw, and their senior team, has been absolutely crucial in guiding the college's transformation.

- Most of you make the progress that we would expect. However, there is still a long way to go before standards are as high as they could be. The college recognises this and is continuing to work at the areas that need strengthening. These include:
- increasing the amount of good and outstanding lessons
- making sure that when you leave school, you have all the skills you need to do well in later life
- continuing to improve the curriculum, particularly the areas that support your personal development
- increasing the quality of your lifestyles by promoting healthy eating habits and physical exercise.

You all have a role to play, not only by working hard and cooperating, but also by having your say and supporting one another in bringing about improvements.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker Her Majesty's Inspector