

Babington Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120294
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	302346
Inspection dates	1–2 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1009
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paula Peers
Headteacher	Judith Smith
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2003
School address	Strasbourg Drive Beaumont Leys Leicester LE4 0SZ
Telephone number	0116 2221616
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Babington is a specialist technology college. Around half the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion who do not speak English as their first language is well above average. A high proportion of students join the college other than at the start of Year 7. Many of these students are either new to this country or new to any formal education and include several who are learning English for the first time. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is well above average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The college provides a satisfactory education for its students. Achievement is satisfactory for all groups, despite standards being exceptionally low. However, students from minority ethnic backgrounds make better progress than their white British counterparts, mainly because they have better attitudes to learning and so attend more frequently. Students' personal development is satisfactory. They cooperate well in lessons once they are settled. However, too many arrive late, which disrupts the start of lessons for the whole class and loses valuable teaching time. The way that this is handled by staff is inconsistent, with some chivvying students along and others ignoring late arrivals. Teaching assistants provide good support for students whose first language is not English, but the tasks set by the class teacher are frequently the same for all students, regardless of their ability. This latter point is the main reason why teaching is no better than satisfactory.

Students receive good care, guidance and support. The many students who join the school late in their education are helped to settle in quickly. The college staff place a great emphasis on ensuring students are safe at college and in the other establishments that are used to provide a worthwhile experience for students. Several different and successful ways are used to support students who are at risk of disaffection so that they continue their studies.

The satisfactory curriculum provides a wide range of choices in Years 10 and 11. The use of vocational qualifications provides a considerable boost to the proportion of students leaving with five or more good GCSE grades. The work on basic literacy skills is proving successful in raising standards, but the same attention is not paid to developing students' basic numeracy skills in lessons other than mathematics.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college managers, including governors, monitor its work well so they have lots of information about the quality of education that it provides. The evaluation of this information, however, is rather generous. The good management of the college's specialist status has led to improved standards in many areas, but achievement is now slipping back from the previous good level. Nevertheless, the past record of the managers shows they have the skills needed to improve performance.

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.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards by introducing a more consistent and effective approach to developing students' basic skills of numeracy.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that the tasks set are suitable for the different abilities represented in classes.
- Improve students' attitudes by having a concerted whole-school approach to dealing with late arrivals to lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join and leave the college with standards that are exceptionally low. Nevertheless, achievement is satisfactory for all groups of students, although students from minority ethnic backgrounds make better progress than white students.

Achievement in mathematics was particularly poor last year, mainly because some students were entered for the wrong tier of examination. The paper they took was for grades C and above, so instead of getting a grade D as expected, they ended up as ungraded. Students are currently making satisfactory progress in English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The school is a racially diverse and harmonious community. Most students enjoy coming to school and get on well with one another. Their attitudes to learning are satisfactory. Once they have arrived at a lesson, and are settled, they are cooperative and willing to work. However, most lessons do not get off to a prompt start because pupils arrive late and ill-prepared. Although all pupils were given a full set of writing materials at the start of the school year, lesson time is lost as teachers hand out equipment.

Attendance has slowly been improving over the last four years. It was just below the national average last year, but current data suggest that it may have dropped back a little this year. White British students' attendance is worse than others, which partly accounts for them not doing as well. Another factor is the better attitudes of students from minority ethnic groups, who are quicker to get to lessons and start work.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The extent to which they adopt a safe lifestyle is also satisfactory. They know how to stay safe, but do not always think about the welfare of others as they move around the school. Behaviour is satisfactory and the number of exclusions is relatively low. Pupils' adoption of a healthy lifestyle is good; many walk to school and around half participate in extra-curricular sporting events. Overall, pupils' personal skills and satisfactory achievement prepare them appropriately for their life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers' clear instructions ensure that students know what is expected of them. Teaching assistants who support those who speak English as an additional language are good at explaining tasks and gently 'pushing students in the right direction', so the students can play a full part in the lesson. Too often, however, the teacher gives the same task to all students, irrespective of their ability. This means the task itself may be too easy for more able students, regardless of their language problems. The support for students with learning difficulties is satisfactory, but sometimes the teaching assistant is slow to intervene, so students do not gain the full benefit of the support.

Marking is good. Comments are detailed and provide clear guidance on what has gone well, as well as very clear pointers about how to improve. Different methods are used for different

groups of pupils. Those who have difficulty reading, for example, will receive verbal comments that are then supported with easier-to-read bullet points.

There is no consistent approach to the way that teachers challenge lateness to lessons. In some cases, students know they have to 'get a move on' because the teacher will punish them for late arrival. In other cases, however, they know that they can drift in up to 15 minutes late without challenge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides a good range of vocational subjects that are well suited to the needs of the students and build well upon their previous studies. Such courses provide a considerable boost to the number of students gaining five or more GCSEs. Many students take part in courses or activities at other establishments, which are effective in ensuring that students at risk of dropping out of education continue their studies.

More time is devoted to lessons than is usually seen, but the effect of this is reduced by the time lost at the start of each lesson while the teacher waits for students to arrive. The impact is greatest on citizenship lessons because they are only 30 minutes long, so half the lesson can be lost. Across the school, the impact of such lessons is patchy, so students' attitudes and understanding of their role in the community are no better than satisfactory.

There are lots of extra activities on offer to students. Many take part in sport, which improves their health and fitness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff go to great lengths to ensure that all students are well cared for. The students' needs are wide-ranging. Many have suffered trauma in their lives, such as being forced to flee their country. The college ensures that there is something in place to support every student. Those that start college at other times than normal are particularly well supported, so they settle remarkably quickly and are soon part of mainstream lessons. Close links with parents and a wide range of external agencies, including counsellors and health professionals, provide effective support for vulnerable and disaffected pupils. Many such pupils have courses especially adapted to their needs, so they come to college, when in other situations they may well become 'school refusers'.

Systems for improving attendance are good, and have resulted in a steady rise in recent years. However, the computerised system is currently providing inaccurate data, and as a result staff are having difficulty in getting a true picture of what is happening this year. Parents rightly feel that their children are well looked after. Health and safety and child protection checks are thorough. Academic guidance is good, especially through mentoring. Students know their target grades and what they need to do to reach them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The college managers, including governors, have been successful at providing systems that ensure that students feel cared for, valued, and that continuing with education is worthwhile.

The management of specialist status is good. Resources have been deployed wisely, which has raised standards. Nevertheless, there are signs that standards and achievement have started to decline, partly because of a difference between the quality of monitoring and the quality of evaluation.

Much monitoring is good. Many checks are made on what the college provides, so managers have lots of data. When evaluating what the data is telling them, however, managers are a little generous. Their data on teaching, for example, shows that its quality is satisfactory, while managers judge it to be good. The evaluation of examination results tends to focus too much on one benchmark - the proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs - so managers get a false impression of whether or not standards are improving. Nevertheless, good monitoring ensures that most weaknesses in provision are identified and addressed. Mathematics is now improving again, because the head of department has implemented many new initiatives. However, the same sense of urgency is not apparent in the promotion of students' numeracy skills in other lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

3 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Babington Community College, Leicester, LE4 0SZ

Many thanks for helping us with the inspection of your college. The things you told us helped us to complete our job more easily.

You told us that you get on well with one another, and we agree. You told us you like the extra sports activities, and we were impressed by how fit you are. We found that you are well looked after at school, and that you get good advice. The people who run the college make sure that you are getting a satisfactory education, so you make the sort of progress we would expect to see. Some students did not do as well in their maths as they should have last year. The college has now got this sorted out, but we have asked teachers to give you more maths practice in other lessons. Those of you who do not speak English as your first language get a good level of support, so you know what you are supposed to be doing in lessons.

Often, teachers give everyone the same task to do, so some of you can find the work a bit easy. To put this right, we have asked your teachers to make sure the tasks are just hard enough to really make you think.

One of the things that you could do to help yourselves is to get to lessons on time. We have asked your teachers to remind you about this, but they shouldn't need to, because you are old enough to take responsibility for this yourselves. You could also make sure you come to lessons with simple things like a pen and pencil.

With all best wishes for your future.

David Driscoll Lead Inspector