

Lea Manor High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109709
Local Authority	Luton
Inspection number	310074
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lincoln James
Headteacher	Ms Christine Lenihan
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2004
School address	Northwell Drive Luton Bedfordshire LU3 3TL
Telephone number	01582 652600
Fax number	01582 652601

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Lea Manor is larger than the average secondary school. It has recently acquired specialist status as a performing arts college. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is high as is the number of students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The level of social deprivation is higher than the national average as is the number of students joining or leaving the school at different times during the year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, which has improved since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further. Since her appointment, the headteacher has provided outstanding leadership and strategic direction, supported by her team of senior leaders and the governing body, which has led to significant improvements.

Standards are rising, particularly in English literature and mathematics where the proportion of students achieving five good grades at GCSE including these subjects is at the national average. Students join the school at the start of Year 7 working at levels below the national average but by the time they leave school, standards are broadly average overall, which represents good progress. Progress is not as good in science as in English and mathematics and there is variation in the performance of students in other subjects. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

The school has a number of outstanding features. The curriculum meets the wide range of needs of students in the school and is backed-up by an extensive provision of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and performing arts, the school's specialist status. Vocational courses prepare students well for the world of work. Care for students, especially those who are most vulnerable, is excellent. Transition arrangements with local primary schools are very well developed. The school has developed outstanding links with organisations and agencies in the local community. Students' contribution to the community is excellent.

Personal development and well-being is good overall. Students' enjoyment of school is reflected by a quote from one parent whose daughter said to her: 'Do you know what, Mum? I'm really happy at school.' Although a number of parents have concerns about student behaviour, the behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and relationships between teachers and students are very good; lessons are generally well managed and controlled and this leads to a positive learning environment. Whilst most teaching is either good or outstanding, the school knows that a small proportion is inadequate. Provision for different groups of learners is not embedded in all lessons. Academic guidance is less well developed than the school's pastoral care. Students do not consistently know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve to reach the next level. Whilst students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported, the focus on their academic guidance is less well developed.

Leadership and management is good overall; in addition to the high quality of the senior leadership team, the governing body provides an outstanding contribution in supporting and challenging the work of the school. There is, however, variation in the quality of leadership of subject leaders and this leads to the differing rates of attainment in subjects. Senior leaders demonstrate through effective school improvement planning that they know what its strengths and areas for development are.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that subject leaders are consistently effective in raising attainment in their subjects.
- Make sure that all students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve and that teachers consistently plan to meet the needs of all learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good. When they join the school at the start of Year 7, they are working at levels that are below the national average. The level of attainment remains low at the end of Year 9 but by the time they leave at the end of Year 11 students have reached standards in line with the national average. This is because of the good progress they make in lessons at Key Stage 4. Their progress is particularly high in mathematics and English literature. Students do consistently well in mathematics throughout the school but do not make as much progress in science.

Over time there is a rising trend in the number of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. The proportion is now in line with the national average, having been significantly below three years ago. Attainment is variable in other subjects however. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. The school knows the proportion achieving five or more GCSE grades from A* to G is too low and is planning to tackle it.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' moral, social and cultural development is good, but their spiritual development is less well developed. The great majority of students enjoy school, feel safe and are free from harassment. Students mix well with each other and appreciate each other's differences. A high number of students benefit from the school's specialist status, which enables them to take part in a diverse range of activities throughout and beyond the school day. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged through high participation rates in sport and the performing arts, as well as the provision of an excellent 'teen clinic', which supports students with sexual health and drugs related issues in particular. Students make an outstanding contribution to both the school and the wider community through their charity fund raising, performing arts events, participation on committees and support in local primary schools.

A significant minority of parents have concerns about student behaviour. However, due to strong relationships with staff, students are generally well behaved in lessons and around the school and respond positively to the expectations staff have of them. Attendance is satisfactory and has improved steadily in all year groups in recent years. There is a strong student and parental voice, with student representatives on a variety of working groups such as the 'strength' committee, which works effectively to reduce the impact of any bullying, as well as the school council. Students have developed good workplace skills that help them to gain the necessary skills for the future; however, they are not involved enough in improving their work independently.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned and structured in detail. Teachers use group and pair work well to enable students to develop their confidence in speaking and listening in a supportive environment. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Teachers use interactive white boards effectively to enhance students' learning. Learning

support assistants are generally deployed well to support students. Through the school's specialist status in performing arts, examples of features of outstanding teaching have been developed as a model to share through the school.

Most of the teaching in school is good or outstanding. Although inspectors saw no inadequate teaching, the school recognises that a small proportion exists for which coaching is being given. Whilst lesson planning is very detailed, it does not consistently build in opportunities to enable students to know how well they are doing and how to improve and does not always plan for the needs of different groups of students. Where teaching is satisfactory there is a lack of pace and too much teacher talk limiting the chance for students to work independently. Teachers do not always check at the end of lessons whether students have achieved their learning objectives.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. A curriculum review has produced activities that match the full range of learners' aspirations and capabilities and promote enjoyment and achievement. Students' learning is enhanced by a wide range of enrichment activities in lessons and after school, in particular, performing arts and sports activities. The take up of these activities is very high. The provision for Saturday courses and catch-up sessions is particularly impressive when teachers give up their own time willingly.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a wide range of GCSE options and a number of vocational opportunities, which offer a strong work-related dimension. The building of a bungalow in the school grounds has been very successful and recognised nationally as a model of good practice. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop their self-confidence is good. Students at risk of becoming disaffected work well with committed learning support assistants, Connexions and other outside agencies to improve their attitudes. There is good provision for gifted and talented students to attend master classes and take additional courses, for example, in GCSE statistics and AS levels in environmental studies and critical thinking. The 'opening minds' curriculum recently introduced in Year 7 has successfully improved attendance and behaviour. Students say they enjoy these sessions, which have improved their learning and independent learning skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares very well for its students. A particularly strong aspect is the work of the teams established to support the most vulnerable students and those with behaviour difficulties. They work well with outside agencies and have put in place some successful initiatives. The school provides parents with the opportunity to support their children with specific issues relating to behaviour through 'project turnaround' and there is also a healthy eating initiative. Pastoral leaders know their students well and track their personal development but the tracking of academic progress is less well developed. Students do not always know the targets or levels they are aiming for or what they need to do to achieve these.

Students from minority ethnic groups integrate well into the school community with few racist incidents reported. The black students achievement programme has had a positive impact on raising the attainment of these students. The 'aim higher' programme has raised the aspirations of many students in Years 9 to 11. Liaison with primary schools is very effective, especially

through the post of a dedicated transition worker to ensure effective continuity and progression in student's care, achievement and standards. There are robust procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of students, including regular safeguarding training for staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a clear vision of the direction the school and provides outstanding leadership. The school has continued to improve under her leadership. A strong ethos of teamwork has been established in the senior leadership team who support her well and are effective. All staff share a common sense of purpose. The effectiveness of subject leaders varies considerably but the leadership in English and mathematics is strong. Improvements in target setting have led to an increase in standards although not all students know their targets yet.

A quarter of the teaching staff has changed in the past two years and recruitment in some subject areas is difficult. In response, the school provides trainee and aspiring teachers with extensive support and training. Some of the most successful senior teachers and subject leaders have been developed in this way. The monitoring of students' performance is developing but is not uniform across the school. Information and communication technology has improved through increased provision.

The income of the school is effectively deployed. Financial control is rigorous and value for money good. The experienced and active governing body is able to challenge the senior staff very well. It has played a significant part in self-evaluation and deciding the school's priorities. Governors and senior staff know very well the strengths and weakness of the school.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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	1
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

4 July 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Lea Manor High School, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU3 3TL

You will know that recently we came to inspect your school. We wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for your welcome and willingness to talk to us, particularly those of you assigned to us to make sure we did not get lost.

We thought you might like to know what we have said about your school. We think you go to a school that has improved and is now good. Some of the features we saw were outstanding, particularly the wide-ranging curriculum, which gives you all the opportunity to take the type of courses most suited to your needs. As you have confirmed in discussions with us, the school looks after you very well, especially those of you who have additional needs. Your senior leaders have a very clear idea of what the school does well and how it can improve further.

Overall, you make good progress in your work, particularly in English and mathematics, but in some other subjects you do not do as well as you could. Quite a few of your parents have concerns about behaviour in school but from what you told us and what we saw, your behaviour and attitude to learning is good. You are especially to be commended for the way you take responsibilities and think of others.

We have made some suggestions to your leaders, which they and we think will help improve the school further.

- Your subject leaders should ensure that you do as well as you can in all subjects.
- Your teachers should consistently let all of you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve your work and, when planning your work, always take account of the different levels you are working at.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for making our visit so pleasurable and wish you every success in your future.

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector