

Ickniel High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109711
Local Authority	LUTON LA
Inspection number	310076
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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	1441
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Blake
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Dean
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Riddy Lane Luton LU3 2AH
Telephone number	01582576561
Fax number	01582561533

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The school is considerably larger than average and growing. It serves a wide area in north Luton, with a socially and culturally mixed intake. Students are not economically disadvantaged, though fewer than average come from homes with experience of higher education. Attainment on entry is broadly average, but the proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is high. About 40% of students are White British while the majority come from a range of minority ethnic communities. Of these, Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi form the largest groups. The school has had specialist status as a visual arts and multimedia college since 1999.

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 with some outstanding features. Parents are right to show the very high level of support revealed by their recent response to the Ofsted questionnaire.

The school's work is ambitious and well organised. The headteacher provides clear vision and a strong sense of direction. Good teamwork has been established to make sure this large school is managed effectively. Self-evaluation is accurate and has helped guide the school to make good improvements in the past with an equally good capacity for further gains. The school's key tasks are done well, so that personal development and academic progress are both good. Some features are outstanding, because they have been pursued with real insight and commitment. For instance, links with other schools and the wider community are outstanding and so is support for vulnerable students. A major factor behind the school's overall success has been its longstanding specialist status. The arts college is exceptionally well led. Through the opportunities it offers and its effect on academic standards it makes an outstanding contribution to school life. Management of science has improved to a satisfactory standard, but has ground to make up. Governors have recently become far better organised and now have a satisfactory and improving impact on the school. Value for money is good.

Students make good academic progress because they are well taught and have a positive approach to school. Their standards are broadly average on entry but above average when they leave. Achievement is strongest in Key Stage 4 where assessment is generally used well and the curriculum has a rich variety that is highly motivating. In Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress. Staff use assessment more variably here and the curriculum is satisfactory. Results at GCSE are particularly good in subjects related to art and design, in English language and in design and technology. The school's most able students match national levels at GCSE but it is right to want more of the highest grades from this group. Day-to-day lessons are not consistent in offering extension work for them. Science standards at both key stages lag behind those of other core subjects because longstanding weaknesses are partially but not fully dealt with.

Teaching and learning includes some outstanding practice and very little indeed that is inadequate. Good lessons predominate and nearly always benefit from positive relationships founded on mutual respect. Explanations are clear and most staff use stimulating resources. The expectations are very high in the best lessons. In others, especially in Key Stage 3, assessment is used with variable effect: staff and students are not always clear about the definition of high quality work and how it can be reached.

The personal development of students is good. This stems from the good care, guidance and support given by the school. One parent spoke of the school 'trying its utmost to resolve personal concerns' and 'showing students how well parents and staff work in partnership'. Students are helped to become confident and sociable. Their constructive approach and good levels of enjoyment also reflect well on the attractive curriculum and good teaching. Spiritual moral and cultural development is good. Students behave well and the great majority are very attentive and helpful in lessons. Attitudes are consistently positive and attendance above average. Their contribution to others is outstanding: they support innumerable events and organisations, especially in arts, music and sports based activities. Personal safety is well understood and bullying rare. Students eat more healthily than usual at lunch times, though less healthy snacks are also common. Extensive sports provision encourages many to exercise

regularly, so their adoption of healthy lifestyles is good. Preparation for work and economic well-being is good. Students generally receive good academic guidance, with clear long-term targets. Assessment offers less clear support on how to improve in the short term.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science by ensuring better initial teaching of concepts and skills, closer monitoring of teaching and earlier intervention where under-performance is identified.
- Increase the proportion of teaching which has the strong pace and challenging work for able students seen in the best lessons.
- Make better use of assessment and marking in the early identification of subjects or students who are not making satisfactory progress, providing more information on how to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average. Achievement is good overall, especially in Key Stage 4, and satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment levels, though a growing number have learning difficulties or disabilities. They leave with above average standards in Year 11 because they are taught effectively, sometimes very well, and because they adopt positive attitudes to learning. GCSE results are especially high in a range of arts subjects, in design and technology and in English Language. Here there is very effective leadership and management and teachers are clear about how to set and meet challenging targets. These features are less evident in science, where standards are broadly average at GCSE and below average at Key Stage 3. The proportion of A and A* grades at GCSE is average, but not as high as it might be and the school is aware of the need to provide greater challenge for its most able students. Since the last inspection, the schools specialist status has made a major contribution to raising standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students' enjoyment in school is strong. One student summed it up when he said, 'I really like drama productions because lots of people get involved.' Behaviour is good. Attendance is above average, helping students make good progress in learning key skills. The school council has surveyed students and appreciates their opinions on a wide range of areas. Healthy lifestyles are adopted well and a significant proportion of students are involved in the dance and gym show. Although students eat healthily at lunch times they are not effectively encouraged to have vegetables and fruit at break times. Students' safety awareness is good because personal, social, health and emotional development sessions focus explicitly on this aspect and are planned really well. Students contribute extremely well to the community. For example, Year 10 students designed and painted beautiful murals for another school which supports students who find learning difficult.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. The very best teaching in some subjects, such as the visual arts, successfully captures students' interest through innovative approaches and provides the necessary challenge that enables those of all abilities to achieve very well. Lessons in general are well planned with clear learning purpose. Students respect their teachers and appreciate the well informed teaching. Positive relationships are fostered in lessons and with few exceptions, classroom behaviour is effectively managed. Consequently most lessons are orderly and enjoyable, with students learning well and able to work with confidence and growing independence.

The school monitors teaching regularly and has a number of good improvement strategies, but there is still some way to go to ensure that all lessons provide sufficient challenge for the more able, particularly in mixed ability groups. Even with some of the very good teaching there is not consistently good practice in marking and ongoing assessment that shows students how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum provision is good, meeting the needs of the majority of students well. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. Liaison with primary schools is good and some Year 9 students can take GCSE examinations early. However core subject schemes of work are only just beginning to serve students well. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is excellent. It offers an extremely wide range of GCSE courses especially in Visual Arts. The success of art and design courses is an area of outstanding success in the school. Through the Campus Luton local consortium arrangements some students complete AS or more practically based courses. Hearing impaired and students with other learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well. The provision to extend learning opportunities of gifted and talented students across the school is not fully developed.

The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of activities including revision classes, sports clubs, music and drama productions, visits to places of interest, exchange visits, and skiing trips. There are extensive artwork displays around the school, a permanent Red Dot art gallery, commissions for work from local businesses and out-reach work in local schools. Eight artists in residence work inside and outside the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for its students, with some aspects being outstanding. The great majority of parents are very positive, although a very small minority expressed minor concerns, for example about a lack of communication from the school. Legal requirements to ensure the safety of children are met. Academic tracking and monitoring helps promote good progress, but lacks consistency of use by subject leaders to drive further improvement. Well-designed systems are in place to ensure good behaviour. The school strives continually to increase still further the already high rate of attendance. All groups of learners are well-cared for, enabling many of them to achieve well. Exceptional, individualised care and

support is provided for many students including some groups such as learners with difficulties or disabilities, young carers, and looked-after children. Students benefit from effective careers education and guidance which addresses their needs. There are outstanding links with a variety of outside agencies, which strengthen the work of the school to support and care for its students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well organised and leadership and management already have a good effect on standards and personal development. The headteacher provides clear vision and a very strong sense of direction, and leadership at every level is ambitious for the school. Recent improvement has improved key areas of the school's work, though some aspects still require attention. Capacity for further improvement is good. Links with other schools and the wider community are outstanding. Leadership of the arts college is also outstanding. Management of science has improved, but has not fully overcome a legacy of underperformance. Governors have recently become far better organised and now have a sound understanding of the school and satisfactory impact on its work.

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Annex A

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	2
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	2

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	2
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?	2
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	2
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	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

28 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Icknield High School, Luton, LU3 2AH

Thank you for making inspectors feel welcome during our visit. Many of you kindly gave up part of lunch time to come and speak with us. We agree with your positive view of the school: it is good and some things are already outstanding.

- Standards are above average and your progress is good.
- Several subjects help you gain especially high GCSE grades.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- The headteacher and senior staff lead the school well; they want the very best for you and know how to improve things further.
- Your behaviour is good and in many lessons very mature. Your attendance is well above average.
- You and the staff make an excellent contribution to people in the local area.
- The school is extremely good at making students of all abilities and backgrounds feel valued and supported.
- The visual arts activities at school are outstanding. They raise standards for the whole school, offer you first-rate courses and open up so many links with other schools and the wider arts 'world'.

If the school is to be even more successful, it needs to do the following.

- Help science results rise. Science teaching has to be more successful at helping you learn things securely first time. Staff need to find out earlier what your weak areas are and be very quick to put these right. You can help by being open about work you are finding difficult.
- Make sure that more lessons in all subjects show the lively pace, challenge for able students and the scope for you to join in that we saw in the lessons.
- Be better at marking all your work and helping you know what is needed to get the better levels or grades.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at Icknield High School.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Drew

Lead inspector