

Lipson Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113544
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311311
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Grahame Sherfield HMI

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1365
Sixth form	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debra McLeod
Headteacher	Steven Baker
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Bernice Terrace Lipson Plymouth PL4 7PG
Telephone number	01752 671318
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Age group	11–19
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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

Lipson Community College is of above average size and has specialist status for the performing arts. It serves students from the surrounding area of the city where fewer adults than average have participated in higher education. The college has a range of external accreditation recognising aspects of its work, notably the Artsmark Gold and the Cultural Diversity Quality Standard gold awards. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals has fallen and is now broadly average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has steadily increased and is well above average. The range includes those with specific learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social needs and moderate learning difficulties. Most students are White British and the percentage speaking English as an additional language is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Lipson is an outstanding college. Together, the principal, senior leaders and staff have created an exceptional and inclusive community where students flourish and develop as individuals. One parent noted that 'The staff and management team work tirelessly and are passionate about their school and the children within it.' Another praised a college 'with so many opportunities, great expectations, positive encouragement and numerous resources in one community'. Inspectors fully agree with these views which are representative of the large majority of parents and carers.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour is exemplary. The vast majority of students enjoy college and attendance is now good as a result of the effective measures taken. Students' mature attitudes to their work and to each other enable them to learn well. They are particularly enthusiastic about the support that teachers and other staff give them and the opportunities outside the traditional curriculum, especially 'Wicked Wednesday'. Participation in the wider community, particularly through the performing arts, makes a significant contribution to personal development. The quality of care, support and guidance is outstanding. The college has clear systems of support to meet individuals' needs and students report that staff are always willing to help them when needed.

Teaching and learning are good with some clear strengths, especially in the performing arts. Lessons are well planned and students generally understand the purpose of the lesson and what is expected of them. As a result, although students' attainment on entry to the college is well below average, they make good progress and reach standards that are a little below average. In a few lessons where activities are not difficult enough, progress slows. The curriculum is innovative, exciting and leads to good engagement. It has some outstanding features, although it is too early for some to have had their full impact on students' progress. The college is at an early stage in maximising the opportunities to develop literacy across the curriculum.

The principal has had an exceptional impact on the development of the college. He is supported by a very strong senior leadership team and by a governing body that provides excellent challenge and support. In order to benefit its students, the college has productively and consistently taken advantage of national developments, for example in conjunction with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and introduced exciting approaches to learning in and beyond the classroom. These have contributed strongly to the sustained improvement since the last inspection which indicates an outstanding capacity to improve further. The performing arts specialism is a key strength of the college and greatly enhances the quality of provision. It is particularly effective in supporting students' personal development and well-being. It leads the way in many initiatives and is strongly supported by staff, students, parents and the local community. The college's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Personal development is outstanding and students are very proud of the sixth form. One parent noted that her son 'positively beams with enthusiasm'. Sixth formers make a major contribution to the college community and most choose to remain in the all-age tutoring arrangements and support younger students. They often take the lead, contributing extensively to 'Wicked Wednesdays', the performing arts and other extra-curricular activities. The care, support and

guidance provided by teachers and other staff are outstanding. As one student put it, 'everybody here helps'.

Students make good progress and attainment is broadly average. Vocational courses are particularly successful with a large number of distinctions. Teaching is good and lessons are clearly structured with good pace and varied activities. The good curriculum caters well for individual needs, with clear pathways that are having an increasing impact on attainment. The effective sixth form consortium with two other local schools provides access to a very wide range of post-16 qualifications. The leadership and management of the head of sixth form and her team are outstanding. Students are set challenging targets and results are improving steadily.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of all teaching to the level of the best in order to raise standards further.
- Extend opportunities across the curriculum for developing literacy skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the college with significant weaknesses in reading and writing. Good teaching has resulted in improved achievement in Key Stage 3. Teachers' assessments indicate that progress is good and Year 9 students are likely to reach standards a little below average by the summer of 2009 in English, mathematics and science.

Progress is good in Key Stage 4 and it is outstanding in some subjects, for example performing arts. The proportion of students gaining five grades at A*-C in GCSE examinations has been improving steadily since 2004 and was a little below average in 2007. Progress has been slower in English and mathematics than in other subjects. Following changes in staffing and better leadership of these subjects, progress is now good. The proportion attaining five grades A*-C including English and mathematics improved significantly in 2008 and the college's assessment data indicate that this improvement is continuing and that standards are likely to rise further in 2009.

The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those with English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to that made by the majority of their peers. The achievement of those on vocational courses is very good and this boosts these students' enjoyment of their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is outstanding. They are proud of their college community and readily take on responsibilities both within and beyond it. Students are thoughtful and reflective and show understanding and acceptance of differences in society, both locally and internationally. They feel safe in the college. Bullying is rare and students know that it is taken seriously and is dealt with effectively. They show good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and diet and participate well in sport, fitness and dance activities both within and outside the curriculum. Students have a clear understanding of the world of work and how to prepare for their future economic well-being. This is being further enhanced by the improvements in students' progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The number of exclusions has reduced

significantly and is low. The college works very effectively with individual students with social and behavioural problems to enable them to stay in college and make progress in their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In most lessons, enthusiastic teachers with good subject knowledge fully engage the students with purposeful activities delivered at a good pace. Knowledge and understanding are acquired quickly, and many teachers are skilled in using resourceful and imaginative methods that promote students' skills in both independent and collaborative working. Good questioning techniques engage students in discussion and help to develop their thinking skills. Most teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and a positive working atmosphere exists across the college. In the small minority of lessons where there is insufficient challenge, learning gains are more limited and higher-attaining students in particular make less progress than they should.

Teachers make good use of assessment information to set appropriate learning goals and to monitor progress closely. Students are confident that they know what their targets are, and how they can improve their work to achieve these, in the majority of their subjects. The quality and frequency of the marking of students' work varies across the college. In the best practice, teachers give detailed guidance on how work could be improved. Senior leaders have rightly identified that making improvements where this does not take place effectively is a priority for future development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The redesigned Key Stage 3 curriculum builds in personal learning and thinking skills as well as practical skills in English, ICT and mathematics. It meets the needs of students well. The work on cooperative learning skills has had a very positive effect on behaviour and motivation in the college. The college is at an early stage in maximising the opportunities to develop literacy across the curriculum.

The 14 to 19 curriculum is developing well and students benefit from the exceptionally wide range of courses at different levels that help them to make progress. Vocational courses are well established and their effectiveness can be judged by the high number of distinctions obtained. These courses, together with the new 14 to 19 diploma, help to meet the needs of individual students well. There are good pathways provided through the local 14 to 19 consortium. Provision for work-related learning, including enterprise, is a strength. Practical skills in English, ICT and mathematics are increasingly built in to the Key Stage 4 curriculum and this is beginning to have an impact on students' progress.

The College's 'Wicked Wednesday' and extra-curricular activities provide an impressive range of opportunities for enrichment and extension. This has a positive impact on engagement, enjoyment and personal development and includes additional opportunities for accreditation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students who are at risk of disaffection or who are vulnerable receive very good support to ensure they remain in college and succeed. Those with physical difficulties and those with learning, behavioural or emotional difficulties also benefit from outstanding care, support and guidance. Parents are delighted with this. There are outstanding systems to track students' progress towards their targets so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. There is a well planned programme of advice on careers and further education, which is highly valued by the students. This gives them a very good understanding of future opportunities, life after college and how to take responsibility for their finances. The college makes excellent use of support from a range of outside agencies to assist in caring for students. Safeguarding and health and safety procedures are robust and effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Senior leaders provide a very clear direction for the further development of the college. As a result of highly effective self-evaluation and subsequent challenging targets, there has been sustained progress guided by the excellent college improvement plan. Innovative approaches are used to engage all staff in actions to improve the college. Middle leaders are very effective and have well designed plans to guide improvements in the various subjects. New approaches to the leadership management of English and mathematics have resulted in significantly improved progress.

The college makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. The sense of community in the college is very strong and there are excellent links with the local area, particularly through the specialism in the performing arts. Outstanding partnerships with a wide range of external agencies extend the opportunities for students both academically and in their personal development. Good examples of these are the effective partnerships with two local schools in the sixth form consortium and with the Connexions service.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14th November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Lipson Community College, Plymouth, PL4 7PG

On behalf of the inspection team, I should like to thank you for your involvement in the recent inspection, particularly for the friendly and open way in which you talked to the inspectors in discussions, in lessons and around the college.

- We judged your college to be outstanding and most of you are rightly very proud of it. We found some important strengths including:
- your outstanding behaviour and very good attitudes towards your work
- the excellent way in which the college cares for you and encourages and supports you in your work and in your personal development
- the wide range of activities in addition to lessons, such as 'Wicked Wednesday', opportunities in the performing arts and in the local community
- the outstanding leadership of the principal, the governors and other staff
- the good progress you make in your work, supported by good teaching and the good curriculum.

We have asked the college to improve two aspects:

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- In most lessons, learning takes place at a good pace, but in a few, progress slows down as work is not difficult enough. We have asked the college to ensure a good pace in all lessons.
- You need more opportunities to develop your skills in reading and writing in the various subjects of the curriculum and we have asked the college to provide these.

Thank you again for your assistance during the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Grahame Sherfield Her Majesty's Inspector