

Birkbeck School and Community Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120653
Local Authority	LINCOLNSHIRE LA
Inspection number	313706
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2008
Reporting inspector	David Martin HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
College	337
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Stevens
Headteacher	Miss Lynda Dobson
Date of previous college inspection	4 October 2004
College address	Keeling Street North Somercotes Louth Lincolnshire LN11 7PN
Telephone number	01507 358352
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the college

Many students come from the local villages in a rural area of Lincolnshire, but an increasing number of students come from outside the designated transport area. The coastal area, from which many students are drawn, is classified as an area of considerable economic and social disadvantage. This has changed the nature of the intake in the last few years. Eligibility for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average, as is the proportion with statement of special educational need. Nearly all students are from White British backgrounds.

The school is a specialist Arts college. A post-16 vocational centre will open on the site in September 2008 as part of joint local post-16 provision. The centre will specialise in Creative and Media, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Diploma courses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 2

Birkbeck School and Community Arts College is a good and improving school. As outcomes for students in terms of their academic and personal development are both good, the school truly lives up to its motto of 'Achievement through caring'.

Leadership and management are good. The improvement seen over the last few years has been sustained despite changes in leadership. The present headteacher and assistant head are in acting roles, and there have been other staffing difficulties to overcome. Despite this, a strong leadership team, supported well by a united and committed staff group have driven forward further improvements. The school accurately identifies areas of weaker performance and takes decisive action. This results in improvement, as seen recently in the increased performance of boys. Similarly, core and specialist subjects have flourished through some inspirational leadership.

The majority of teaching in the school is good. Staff are very committed to the young people and know them very well as individuals. As a result, they are able to use information about their strengths in order to match the work closely to their needs. The students appreciate the extra effort that adults make in terms of individual support, trips, clubs and other activities. The school is aware that there are some inconsistencies in provision. Planning lacks detailed monitoring and evaluation systems and the line management of middle leaders is too informal.

The school meets the needs of pupils satisfactorily through curriculum provision, particularly at Key Stage 4. The development of vocational options, particularly in specialist subjects, has had a significant impact. These courses motivate students and increase their desire to stay in education, as well as providing excellent examination results. Specialist status has had a further impact in providing specialist equipment, notably in excellent ICT provision. Despite the best efforts of leaders and governors, the school has not been able to recruit staff to deliver religious education at Key Stage 4, although this is now in place at Key Stage 3.

The day-to-day care of students is good and relationships are warm and respectful. The improved use of data and assessment information challenges students to do their very best. One student commented: 'in a small school there is no hiding place!' Students start their careers in the school well below national levels of attainment overall. Through effective teaching, care and support they make good progress as they move through the school. In 2007, GCSE results were around or above the national average, which is highly commendable given students' starting points.

Governors have been supportive through a difficult period of transition. They are also prepared to challenge the school. Governors and senior managers know the school well and are aware of strengths and areas to develop further. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Financial management is sound and the school offers good value for money. However, a few statutory requirements need attention that relate to the care of students. The school must ensure, as a matter of urgency, that the single electronic register of adults working in the school is complete, and that training opportunities for all staff are included in the Child Protection policy.

What the college should do to improve further

- Ensure that there is even greater consistency in teaching and learning, assessment and marking by supporting and challenging middle leaders through planning and line management arrangements.

- Ensure that plans to implement religious education provision at Key Stage 4 are realised as a priority.
- Take immediate steps to ensure that the single electronic register of adults working in the school meets all requirements and that the Child Protection policy specifies training opportunities for all staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The standards that students attain by the end of their primary school education are well below average overall. Standards attained at KS3 are below average but have improved considerably in recent years. The attainment of boys is stronger than that of girls, bucking the national trend. Progress in Key Stage 3 has been good for the last three years and particularly strong in 2007.

Attainment at Key Stage 4 has improved to broadly average in 2007. 5A*-C results have improved considerably in recent years to just above the national average. All students have attained five passes at 5A*-G, an impressive achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also attain well. From very low starting points, this means that the progress made by the time students leave the school is good.

The school sets increasingly demanding targets. The school collects assessment information regularly and uses it to target additional help for those in most need. Parents and students commented positively on target-setting days.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' enjoyment of school is reflected in above average attendance and good participation in extra-curricular activities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is good and contributes to a sense of harmony in school. There are plenty of opportunities for recognition, which raise students' self-esteem. Older students have the confidence to show initiative and make their views known to staff. They are prepared to take on resulting responsibilities, including running and organising their common room or fundraising activities. Students develop a clear set of values and have a strong sense of fairness. They form friendships with peers and constructive relationships with staff. By learning about a range of customs and cultures, students develop tolerance and appreciation of differences.

The school successfully encourages an awareness of healthy living, and students increasingly adopt healthy lifestyles. They know how to keep themselves safe, when using the internet for instance. However, they are not always encouraged to take responsibility for safety in the classroom. They willingly take on roles within the school community, such as mentoring younger students, and contribute more widely by serving at a local luncheon club. Students develop their basic skills well, grow in self-awareness, form career preferences and acquire enterprise and team working skills, so they are well prepared for the world of work and further education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons take place in a calm and orderly environment, and are characterised by positive and constructive relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves. Lessons are mainly well-structured and with a brisk pace, allowing students' knowledge and skills to build steadily and letting them see the links between their learning.

The best lessons give students the confidence and the opportunity to become independent learners. Teachers generally use assessment information effectively to judge where to pitch the lesson, and to know exactly what progress students are making. Most teachers provide a great deal of individual attention during lessons. Staff also use technology imaginatively to provide interest and variety. Teaching assistants provide effective support for students with individual needs.

Marking of students' work is on the whole carried out regularly, and provides helpful feedback for students to improve, although there is still some inconsistency in practice. When lessons are less successful, it is often because they lack pace and challenge, and expectations of pupils are too low.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of students of all abilities. There are productive links with primary schools which help give continuity to students' education. Arts College status has benefited the school in a number of ways. It has enhanced the facilities for creative work; broadened the curriculum; provided additional opportunities for students; and enabled the school to adopt some innovative teaching approaches. Although the range of option choices at Key Stage 4 is limited in a small school, the guidance process is thorough and students report that it meets their needs. The provision of vocational courses has been valuable in extending provision and there are plans to provide post-14 diplomas on a collaborative basis, which are intended to further develop the range of appropriate courses students can follow at Key Stage 4.

Despite the best efforts of the school and the Governing Body to recruit suitable teachers, there is still no religious education provision at Key Stage 4, and therefore statutory requirements are not being met.

The school provides a good range of enrichment activities for students, notably trips, visits, cultural events and clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Arrangements to support the transition from primary education help students to settle quickly. Parents see the school as providing 'a caring, nurturing environment'. Students receive good support. Those who need help in learning have key workers; others develop consistently good behaviour and attendance through effective support; links with external agencies provide additional support as required. Good quality guidance helps students to make informed choices about options beyond Year 9 and opportunities at post-16.

Risks, such as those associated with educational visits, are carefully assessed and suitable action is taken to assure students' safety. Before they are appointed, staff are checked to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. However, the central record does not contain all the information required, particularly with regard to qualifications. Although the designated child protection coordinator has received suitable recent training, arrangements for the training of all staff are not included in the policy as required.

Students are well known to staff, who have high aspirations for them. Teachers carefully track the progress that they make and students know the levels or grades that they are working at.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, assistant head and most of the extended leadership team are presently working in an acting capacity. They have been successful in sustaining the progress that students make through this period leading up to the appointment of a permanent headteacher.

The school improvement plan clearly identifies priorities and planned actions. The school has a good record of identifying areas that need to improve and taking decisive and effective steps. However, the methods for monitoring and evaluating these actions are not always clear and consequently school self-evaluation is satisfactory. A more formal line management of middle leaders is not yet fully in place to ensure greater consistency of practice. Many subject leaders, however, are very effective in raising classroom practice and standards, particularly in core and specialist subjects. The school building is well maintained and resources, particularly for ICT, are very good.

Governors know the school well and are both supportive and, where necessary, critical in their involvement in monitoring the school's work. However, they are not yet working closely enough with the local authority to ensure that the single electronic record of adults working in the school is completely up to date.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	College 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 college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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	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	3
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	2
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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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 college'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?	No
Does this college require special measures?	No
Does this college require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Birkbeck School and Community Arts College, Louth, Lincolnshire L11 7PN

I am writing to tell you what we found when we inspected your school recently. Firstly, though, I would like to thank you all for the part that you played in the two days. You were friendly and helpful in openly sharing your views and opinions. You clearly appreciate the good education provided and take pride in your many achievements. You and your parents believe that Birkbeck is a good school, and we agree. These were particular strengths:

- You all make good progress in learning as you move through the school and achieve highly creditable examination results.
- You succeed in English, mathematics and ICT as well as the specialist college subjects. This prepares you well for the next stage of your education.
- Staff know you well and encourage you to do your very best.
- Relationships are warm, respectful and friendly. This is one of the advantages of a successful small school, as many of you appreciate.
- Adults go 'the extra mile' to support you and provide many trips and activities.
- Most teaching is good and meets your needs and interests very well.
- Adults and students look after the school well and you have good access to ICT.

Even good schools can improve. Many of you realise that there is a lack of specialist provision in some areas because of the size of the school, for example textiles. We hope that the new post-16 provision will help. We have also asked the adults who manage your school to take the following actions to make things even better:

- Work with all teachers and other staff to make sure that learning is as good in all classrooms as it is in the very best.
- Check that marking and the use of assessment information is consistent in order to help you to continue to make such good progress. We have also asked the governors to ensure that some important administrative tasks are completed, in order to meet the requirements of the Government.

Thank you once again for your friendly welcome. We will take away many happy memories of the school. We would like to wish you all the very best in the future.

David Martin Her Majesty's Inspector