

Latimer Community Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122066
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314211
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Mary Davis

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1139
6th form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Wood
Headteacher	Christopher Grimshaw
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Castle Way Barton Seagrave Kettering NN15 6SW
Telephone number	01536 720300
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Latimer Arts College serves a diverse socio-economic area and takes students from the community around Kettering. Most students are White British, and the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average, while that for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national average. The college has a unit for students with hearing impairment. The school was awarded specialist college status in the arts in 1997.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Latimer Arts College provides a good standard of education. It is an improving specialist college with a good sixth form and is highly regarded for the quality of its work in, and for, the community. The impact of its arts college status is outstanding, not only on the curriculum, but also in the performing arts techniques that enrich teaching and learning across the college. It also contributes to students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The outstanding partnerships within the community enable a high proportion of students to take part in a wide variety of activities. One parent commented, 'The arts aspect of the college has encouraged my daughter to explore and enjoy other areas of the curriculum which otherwise may not have been available to her.'

Students are welcoming, confident and well mannered. They respect and care for each other, following the example set by their teachers and the principal. As a result, relationships and attitudes to learning are positive and students' behaviour is exemplary. As one student commented, 'We expect to behave well.' These mature attitudes equip them well for the world of work.

Current evidence shows that standards are above average and achievement is good. Good teaching is resulting in good progress at all levels. A dip in achievement in some areas in 2007 has now been resolved, the result of appropriate intervention by senior leaders, including appointing new subject leaders in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Progress in English at Key Stage 3, identified in 2007 as a concern, is now good, as seen in the results of rigorous tracking of students' work by the department. Higher attaining students make good progress and are reaching their targets, although teachers do not consistently provide work that challenges these students enough. Sixth form students achieve well and reach average standards.

The good curriculum is constantly evolving to match students' individual needs. The impact of its specialist status is exemplified by the introduction of a new Diploma in Creative and Media for 14 to 18 year olds at three levels, in partnership with local businesses.

Students feel safe as a result of the good pastoral care that the college provides. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including students in the hearing impaired unit, are well cared for and integrate well into college life. Students make an outstanding contribution to the college and wider community through the students' council and through a variety of schemes that enable older students to receive training, thus enabling them to support younger ones effectively. Sixth form students take an active role in college life and receive good guidance in preparation for their future steps. The progress of all students is monitored regularly and those identified as underachieving are well supported, for example by a full-time mentor. Assessment practices, however, do not always ensure that all students know how to improve their work.

The effective monitoring and self-evaluation procedures demonstrated by the leaders of core subjects have led to improving standards, but these practices are not yet embedded across the whole college. Good leadership has ensured that all staff share the responsibility for raising standards and achievement and, as stated in the college's mission statement, are focused on developing 'creative and independent citizens equipped to engage with the world of tomorrow'. The college has made good improvement since the last inspection and is displaying good capacity to develop further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The students' view is that 'Latimer sixth form is a friendly and supportive community where you learn and pursue the path you wish to follow.' The sixth form is inclusive and admits students who may not have reached the school's benchmark grade for academic study. Although the A-level results in 2007 were below average, the college's data indicate that the 2008 results will be closer to the national average, which represents good achievement. Drama, dance and applied business perform well, but there are some variations in performance between subjects.

Students are articulate and good ambassadors for the school. Their personal development is good and they play an active part in the college community. They support younger students of the college and in local primary schools. Students value the good teaching they receive, commenting on the good working relationships and the commitment of their teachers. Their well-developed independent learning techniques prepare them well for further education. The good curriculum provides an extensive range of academic courses, together with an exciting range of arts-based vocational courses.

Care, guidance and support are good. Students' progress is carefully monitored and swift action taken to support those who are underperforming. The good leadership team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and are quick to develop strategies for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure that learning activities fully meet the needs of higher attainers.
- Consolidate the recent improvements in achievement, by ensuring that all students know how to improve their work.
- Share and embed the good practice in monitoring found in the core subjects with all leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students join the school having reached average standards in the national tests in English, mathematics and science in their previous schools. Standards over the past three years have been broadly average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Current tracking, based on secure evidence, demonstrates that the 2008 results in Year 9 and Year 11 will reach above average standards, demonstrating good achievement. This has been achieved by better intervention, including mentoring. Teachers' assessments indicate that the current Year 9 students are now close to their targets in English, while exceeding them in mathematics and science, including those for the more able students. Results of modular tests, mock examinations and tracking evidence indicate a higher proportion of students than the national average gaining GCSE grades A* to C, with a significant improvement in mathematics. New leadership in ICT, highlighted as underperforming in 2007, is already able to report above average results. Current evidence indicates that students are now progressing well. Some students with additional learning needs, identified as underachieving in 2007, are now achieving equally as well as their peers, as are those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those supported in the hearing-impaired unit.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are proud of their college and enjoy their learning. This is shown by the good attendance of most students, although a small minority fail to attend regularly. As a result, overall attendance is satisfactory. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding in most respects, but their multicultural awareness is less well developed. Large numbers participate in the many activities within and beyond the college community. Their concern for the wider world is reflected in successful charity collections, with students showing good awareness of the needs of the global community. Well-developed social skills enable them to express their personal opinions and ideas confidently, both in and out of their lessons. Work experience, citizenship programmes and enterprise activities, together with good basic skills, foster their economic well-being effectively.

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the college is outstanding. There is a clear intolerance of bullying, which students say is very rare. Some older students relish responsibilities such as peer mentoring and as student council representatives, others offer opinions readily on issues such as new buildings, school uniform and meal options. They speak enthusiastically about sporting and outdoor adventure activities that support active lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Relationships are founded on mutual respect and trust and as a result, students are attentive in class and enthusiastic about their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and have high expectations of their students. They use assessment information to plan their lessons well, providing a variety of active tasks to engage students' interest and make lessons fun. Assessment techniques, used by performing arts subjects, are used across the college, enabling students to contribute confidently to their learning, evaluating their own and each other's work. Learning objectives are clear so that students know what they have to achieve by the end of the lesson. In most lessons, teachers move their students on at a fast pace, using effective questioning techniques to evaluate their learning, and to extend their understanding. Support staff are well deployed within the classroom.

Opportunities were missed in some lessons to reinforce students' learning through involving them in active tasks. There is inconsistent practice across the school in providing sufficiently challenging tasks to stretch the most able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The college provides a well-planned and innovative curriculum that has some outstanding features. The broad and balanced curriculum and its development have been significantly enhanced by the impact of specialist arts college status. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is

broadened by the inclusion of dance and drama. In addition, the range of learning opportunities in more traditional subjects is enhanced by, for example, the use of video. Significant curriculum development in the performing arts at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, with the college playing a leading role, has further broadened subject choices already made for the new school year. The impact of these developments is to improve the Key Stage 4 curriculum by reducing the large number of subjects currently on offer, thereby increasing the time allocated to individual subjects and making clearer the pathways for progression between Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. It is too early to judge the impact of these developments on achievement and standards.

Strong partnerships with other institutions and local business support the curriculum well. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum provides a full range of academic subjects and has a strong work-related dimension. There is an outstanding range of enrichment opportunities, including a wide range of clubs, sports fixtures and residential experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The college provides a safe learning environment which is acknowledged by students. All safeguarding procedures meet requirements. The college has successfully reduced the rate of the persistent absence of a minority of students.

Parents comment very positively about the arrangements that ensure their children make a happy and confident transfer from primary school. Students are well informed when considering options at the end of Key Stage 4. Very effective structures support students who are vulnerable and those who are at risk from becoming disaffected. Links with parents are very strong, as are the links with external agencies that further support students' well-being. This has served to reduce the number of exclusions over the past year. A well-established peer mentoring training programme further enhances support. Guidance systems, developed since the last inspection, are more effective in meeting academic, as well as personal needs. Form tutors play a central role in monitoring progress and checking targets. The college acknowledges that although students' knowledge of their own progress is improving, the methods used to promote this are not fully effective. Marking and assessment practices are not applied consistently to enable all students to know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The principal provides clear leadership and direction and this is acknowledged by students, their parents, staff and governors. The effective leadership team shares his vision, so there is a good commitment to college improvement. One parent summarised this vision well with the words, 'Latimer is a school that provides a good balance in all areas of education.' Governors know the college's strengths and areas for development well. They challenge and support the principal to ensure improvement, especially to standards.

The college's judgement about standards and achievement in 2007 has been too generous. However, the leadership has been quick to react to the underachievement indicated by the

2007 results. Robust strategies have been implemented that have resulted in rapid improvements during the past year. Lesson observations are an established feature of the school. The process used by the core departments, which results in regular self-evaluation, has been successful. This is because the lesson observations have focused on key areas that will improve provision and achievement. Students are partners in the evaluation process, contributing to improved lesson planning. The process of setting targets is secure and there is sufficient data to track students' progress, although the confidence of staff in using this data effectively varies.

The principal is a visible presence around the campus and his warmth towards and care for students ensure a genuine commitment by leaders to the personal development and well-being of all learners. The college is inclusive in its outstanding support for students with a hearing impairment and good support for students with other learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

A range of adults support students effectively and provide good value for money. Improvements in accommodation and resources, the latter due to good financial management, have helped increase students' pride in their college.

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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?	2	2
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	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 disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	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 the 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?	2	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	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	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	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Latimer Arts College, Kettering, NN15 6SW

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your college. We were particularly impressed with the welcome you gave us and appreciated your help in enabling us to find our way around the college. We know that you are proud of your college and value the education you receive. You go to a good school. These are our main findings.

- Standards in Years 7 to 11 are above average and are broadly average in the sixth form, and there are clear signs that you are working hard to improve. The tracking of your progress and recent examination results show that you are making good progress.
- The college's specialist arts status is enabling you to develop as confident young people and we were very impressed by your behaviour and the way in which you relate to your teachers and each other. We particularly liked the way in which older students care for younger ones.
- The good teaching you receive ensures you learn well. You are showing that you can think for yourselves and take responsibility for your own learning. You told us that the most able students are not always stretched in every lesson by more challenging work and we agree.
- The curriculum that you follow is good and the opportunities you are offered in the performing arts are exciting.
- The good care you receive enables you to feel safe and well supported. You know what you are aiming for and how to achieve your targets. We think, however, that the college can do more to ensure that you all know how to improve your work.
- The leadership is working hard to ensure that you continue to improve and that the teaching you receive will enable you to succeed.

All of the above applies to the sixth form as well as the main school. In order to take your learning to new heights, we have asked the college to ensure that the most able students are sufficiently challenged in lessons and that the marking of your work always helps you to understand what you need to do next.

You can help by always working hard, and striving to 'learn, achieve and create'.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Mary Davis Lead inspector