

Leiston Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124819
Local Authority	SUFFOLK LA
Inspection number	315072
Inspection dates	12–13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Hewitt

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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	673
6th form	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lesley Hill
Headteacher	Mr Ian Flintoff
Date of previous school inspection	17 November 2003
School address	Seaward Avenue Leiston Suffolk IP16 4BG
Telephone number	01728830570
Fax number	01728832227

Age group	13–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Leiston is a relatively small school in a setting of rural deprivation and isolation. Almost all students come from White British backgrounds. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average although the proportion with statements of special educational need is above average. The school gained specialist technology college status in 2001. In 2004, the school was awarded 'Leading Edge' status, for sharing good practice. The school was re-designated as a technology college in 2005 and gained vocational college status.

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 and inclusive school which has been successful in gaining technology and vocational specialist school status. In addition, it has earned national recognition for the quality of its work in raising achievement through sharing good practice with partner schools. In a warm and friendly atmosphere, all groups of learners make at least good progress. In some important areas of the school, performance is outstanding. Students are very well cared for and enjoy a safe and stimulating environment, in which their personal development and well-being is excellent.

Achievement is good. Students enter the school with below average knowledge and skills. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, standards are above average and almost all students have achieved five or more GCSE passes. The school has maintained high levels of student progress for three years, which places it in the top 25% of schools nationally. Many students stay on to attend the open access sixth form, which caters for a wide range of abilities. Students' progress across the school in English, mathematics and art is excellent but leaders know there is more work to do in ensuring all subject areas reach the same high standards. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered a range of alternative qualifications that helps them to secure a sound footing to pursue the next stage in employment, further education or training.

The impact of the school's specialist status and its work with partner schools in raising standards is marked. Innovative work in literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) has improved the provision across the school and with partner schools. This has resulted in all students having access to 'technology for learning.' Recent vocational course developments in the school have enabled it to offer an enhanced and outstanding curriculum that is carefully designed to meet the specific needs of learners. The school has taken altruistic steps to address the skills shortage in the local community through successfully introducing courses that have not necessarily played to the school's traditional strengths. The school has much to be proud of in its links with other partners and these have secured some exciting new courses, particularly in the sixth form, where students can combine continuing their education with valuable work experience.

Overall teaching in the school is good, and in some areas outstanding and the school is taking steps to improve provision so that all teaching reaches these levels. The best teaching takes place when teachers encourage students' enthusiasm to participate actively in their learning. Teachers use available data very well to inform students about the quality of some of their work and the steps they need to take to improve it. However, this is not always evident in the marking of books and the day-to-day guidance in lessons.

A strength of the school is the care and support offered to all the students. This has resulted in a warm and supportive community. The sixth form students play a pivotal part in this, providing younger students with excellent role models. Many act as mentors and this has resulted in an increasing number of youngsters aspiring to join the sixth form.

The headteacher provides a clear direction for the school with measured determination. He sets high expectations for all members of the school community. Supported by the senior leadership team, he has put in place strategies to ensure individual student progress is monitored. Middle leaders also contribute to school evaluation and monitoring, sometimes very effectively,

but this is not consistent, and the school is working to establish formal systems to support them.

The governing body supports the school well and keeps close links with departments. Governors have developed their roles as critical friends effectively. The school shows strong capacity to improve, it has taken innovative steps to improve the choice of courses for students and it prepares them exceptionally well to take their place as confident, skilled citizens.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Exam results in 2007 were broadly average, with some exceptional performances in English and art. The school has worked hard in recent years to integrate more students who do not attain five or more GCSE grades A* to C into the sixth form. A growing proportion of students take courses that link study with work placements. Due to these arrangements, standards on entry to the sixth form are currently slightly lower than nationally. Students achieve well and the school's data shows improvement, especially in areas which have performed less successfully in the past. Students' personal development is outstanding. Sixth-formers play a very significant role in school life, enjoying the responsibilities open to them and adding to the cohesiveness of the community. The students' very positive attitudes to their studies are reflected in their attendance, which is above average. Teaching is good and the regular assessment of students' work helps to identify those who are at risk of under achievement. However, the marking of books and the day-to-day guidance in lessons does not always give students an accurate picture of the quality of their work. The outstanding curriculum facilitates many academic and vocational opportunities in this isolated rural sixth form. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make students' levels of achievement across all subject areas more consistent.
- Develop systems to support middle leaders in fulfilling their roles in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.
- Improve the marking of books and the quality of day-to-day guidance to students to help them to identify the next steps they should take to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter the school with below average skills and knowledge. They attain standards in line with national averages at the end of Year 9. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, standards overall are above average, which represents good progress. The school is in the top 25% of schools nationally for students' achievement and this position has been maintained for three years. Performance in English, mathematics and art is excellent. However, there is some significant underachievement in design technology and in the performing arts and there are inconsistencies in the progress students make in some other subjects. Students' attainment in the sixth form varies from well above average to below average and the school is doing good work to improve consistency between subjects.

Specialist school status has had a positive impact in improving basic skills in literacy and ICT, which enables students to have access to all areas of the curriculum. It has also had a very good

influence on students' motivation and their attitudes to learning. This is reflected in the increasing number of students who join the sixth form to pursue vocational courses. All groups of learners make good progress as they move through the school. Their progress is monitored carefully and swift action is taken where youngsters are not fulfilling their potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students speak highly of their school and enjoy their learning. One student explained, 'Everything we do here is recognised and valued'. Learners say they feel safe at school and report that incidents of bullying are rare. When incidents do occur, they are dealt with effectively. Students have an effective voice through the school council and the school is seeking to extend their role to support school improvement. They take active responsibility for their own well-being and run a support group to deal with individual problems and concerns. They have a well-developed social awareness and, as a result, there is a relaxed and calm atmosphere throughout the school.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They are highly committed to adopting healthy lifestyles. For example, a student committee meets regularly with canteen staff to monitor food choices. Participation levels in sports and performing arts activities are high and this demonstrates the students' enjoyment and loyalty to the school. Attendance is also good. Students have positive attitudes to their learning. They make good use of careers guidance and feel that the school prepares them extremely well for life after school. The sixth form involvement in the life of the school is exemplary. They play a major role in the running of the house system and organising a range of charity events. They also produce a school newspaper and act as mentors for younger students. They are excellent role models who are valued by the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students learn well and make good progress because the overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and skills and convey these well through clear explanations and effective questioning techniques. Behaviour in lessons is good because of the trusting relationships between students and their teachers. There are well-established routines in lessons, which promote very good attitudes to learning. Oral feedback to students is very good and the students' main pieces of work are helpfully marked to give them an accurate picture of what they have done well and what steps they need to take to improve. However, this is not done consistently in the marking of their books. In the best lessons teachers give students tasks which give them the opportunity to be active and take responsibility for their learning. For example, in a Year 10 physical education lesson, students were given the responsibility of applying assessment criteria to their own skills in using the trampoline.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements. The school has used its specialist status to secure innovative changes. As well as providing a good choice of GCSE courses, there is a growing emphasis on developing exciting vocational courses, some of which are linked with the school's partners. A number of the courses followed by students have elements of work experience and include basic skills development. This ensures that the needs of the full range of students are met outstandingly well. The key to this provision is the innovative way in which the school has forged links with other providers to expand opportunities. One example is the excellent work the school does with the North Suffolk Skills Centre. Provision for ICT across the range of subjects has improved tremendously since the previous inspection, and in many subjects ICT is used very well to enhance learning. The range of extra-curricular opportunities, especially in sports and the arts is very good, with high levels of student involvement. This is impressive considering the distance many students travel to school. The physical education department, in particular, has set up some challenging programmes for its talented students, which are to be used as a model for widening the provision for gifted and talented students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The small school community has a well-developed approach to student guidance and support. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities are closely monitored and they make good progress. There is a strong emphasis on building trusting relationships and students develop good attitudes both socially and academically as a result. Parents view the school positively and one parent commented, 'It has been a pleasure to watch my children flourish.' A small minority of parents and carers expressed concern about behaviour, but inspectors judge these concerns to be unfounded. The school is seeking to engage parents further in all aspects of school life, including increasing their involvement in knowing what their children need to do to improve their work. Students have good guidance regarding future study and career paths, which results in the vast majority of students taking up employment, education or training when they leave the school. However, the written guidance students receive in their books is not consistently of the same high standard. The impact of the school's specialist status in supporting student achievement can be seen in the number of students who enter the sixth form. The school takes a robust approach to fulfilling its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school through good monitoring systems. The school has identified where there is excellent teaching and some work has been done to share this across the school, such as about the consistency of lesson planning. The school knows there is more work to be done to ensure the consistency in middle leaders' evaluations. Senior leaders have strategies in hand to help them. Cohesion between

the school's various initiatives is good and the school is using its specialisms to personalise the curriculum to the needs of learners and the wider community. For example, ICT effectively helps improve students' basic skills and the school offers support to its partner schools by sharing this good practice.

A very strong feature of the school is the impressive work done with its many partners. This has resulted in an adventurous approach to the curriculum. The sixth form 'link courses' engage students who are vulnerable to dropping out of education, employment or training. The school has been very successful in identifying the unique needs of the local community and ensuring students have the right blend of skills and attributes to meet that need. The headteacher, supported by staff and governors, is open to new ideas. There are many instances of the school's good work and innovation being shared and used as examples of good practice. The school has created an environment of creativity and care, in which students flourish.

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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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
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	1	

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?	1	1
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

14 December 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Leiston Community High School, Leiston, IP16 4BG

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons. You were very open about the things you like best about your school.

The school does everything well and some things outstandingly well. The teachers and other adults in the school provide high quality care and support for you. Lessons are good and you make good progress. Your learning is better when you have interesting activities to complete and this helps you to take responsibility for your own learning.

The variety of subjects you can do in the school is excellent and you think so too, as so many of you go on to join the sixth form. Some of you are working with the school's partners or combining your studies with work experience. We think this will really help you to be skilled members of the community when you leave school.

Your status as a technology and vocational college has improved your ICT and literacy skills and this helps you to make good progress in other subjects too. You all achieve very well in mathematics, English and art and we have asked your headteacher to make sure that you get the chance to achieve at the same high level in all of your subjects.

We were impressed to see that so many of you take part in after school activities, even though this sometimes means a difficult journey home afterwards. The success of your production of 'Oliver' illustrates your loyalty to the school.

The teachers check your best work regularly and help you to see what you need to do to improve and we have asked them to make sure you get the same kind of help when they mark your books. Mr Flintoff and other senior staff make regular checks on the quality of your lessons and we have asked him to make sure all senior teachers help him so that every subject is checked thoroughly and this will help you to do the very best you can.

Your school is a good place to learn and you can continue to play an important part by making sure you always work hard and listen to advice from your teachers.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Lead inspector