

Launceston College

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	112037
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	325513
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Caroline McKee

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)	1356
Sixth form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Kennedy
Principal	Jack Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
School address	Dunheved Road Launceston PL15 9JN
Telephone number	01566 772468
Fax number	01566 777371

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Launceston College is a larger-than-average school which draws from the town and surrounding rural villages. Most students are from a White British background, although there are a few students from a range of other ethnic heritages. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. Provision for those students with profound and multiple learning difficulties is in a specialist unit at the school. For others who are at risk of permanent exclusion, there is an off-site centre. The school has specialist status in technology. A new principal started in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Launceston College is good and improving. The sense of purpose generated by the new principal has resulted in improvements, particularly in academic standards in the sixth form since September 2008. The college's ambition is clear and it is one which the whole school community has adopted with enthusiasm. Staff have welcomed this clarity and purpose. Students themselves comment how much they enjoy the fresh demands put on them, and many, but not all, parents recognise the determination and resolve of the principal. As one parent typically commented, 'There is a much greater focus on learning.' The outstanding inclusive nature of the college is a distinctive feature. Every person really does matter.

Students achieve well throughout their time at the college and reach above average standards from their starting points. Examination results have improved steadily and predictions and standards for this year indicate further improvements in Year 9 and Year 11. This is the result of higher expectations, a sharper focus on students' progress, more challenging targets and more consistent use of performance data to gear work to individual students' needs, particularly in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at risk of permanent exclusion make good and sometimes outstanding progress because of the good care, support and opportunities provided.

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. The students enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. They say they feel safe, are aware of potential risks in life and know how to manage them. They appreciate the good care and guidance provided. A few students choose to opt out of learning and disrupt lessons, particularly if their behaviour is not managed well by the teachers. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about behaviour and bullying but students said that this was normally dealt with effectively through the behaviour and anti-bullying procedures. The inspectors found behaviour to be good overall, with positive relationships between adults and students. The students have a good understanding of how to live healthily and participate enthusiastically in the good range of extra-curricular activities. Students' contribution to the local and global community is particularly strong with opportunities to work with children from other countries. The school takes full advantage of its technology college status to promote these links.

The college's curriculum is outstanding and is successful in meeting the diverse needs and aspirations of each student. Teaching is good, leading to improved standards. The use of more challenging targets is encouraging both students and teachers to aim higher. Many teachers adopt effective strategies to develop students' learning skills and independence. This is best at Key Stage 4, but is not so well embedded in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, where, in some lessons, students are less clear about what it is they need to do to improve.

Middle leaders are becoming increasingly and successfully more accountable, though there are still some inconsistencies, between departments and faculties, in the rigour and in the way in which data is analysed. Leadership and management, including the support of governance, are good, providing a clear steer for improvement. With this clear agenda, fuelled with a good team spirit, the college has a good capacity for further development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards and achievement in the sixth form had regressed over the last four years and in 2008 students achieved unsatisfactorily. New leadership this year, appointed as a result of decisive action by the principal, has arrested this decline. Standards are improving and, although these are on the low side of broadly average, students are now making satisfactory progress. The college offers a good range of academic courses and an increasing range of vocational courses. There is some variability in the standards reached by students in different subjects. While in some, students perform in line with expectations, in others, performance has been below expected levels. Teaching is satisfactory and improving with greater and well-targeted use of data to raise expectations and improved planning to meet the needs of all students. Students have a good knowledge of their current attainment and are increasingly aware of what they need to do to improve. Students enjoy college as can be seen by the high number of students who move from Year 11 into the sixth form, their improved attendance and the high percentage who stay to complete their courses to the end of Year 13. Students respect their teachers and appreciate the time they give to caring and supporting them. Students take on a range of responsibilities, such as mentoring younger students, and often take the lead in supporting primary school groups, charities and international links. As a result, their personal development is good. Leadership and management are good. The head of sixth form and his team work well together and have a clear plan for development. They have made a strong start, resulting in a significant impact in recent months.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching in the sixth form and Key stage 3 to raise standards and increase students' independent learning skills.
- Provide more rigorous monitoring by middle managers to ensure consistent and detailed analysis of data to highlight strengths and weaknesses in planning for the improvement of learning.
- Ensure all teachers, particularly in Key Stage 3, provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for managing their learning and have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and meet their learning targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

At GCSE, results in different subjects vary. Good results in 2008 in design and technology, geography, French, biology, chemistry and physics were not matched in other subjects, particularly English literature and history. The percentage achieving five or more A* to C grades increased in 2008 but remained the same when including English and mathematics. However, determined intervention has been effective in tackling these issues and current Year 11 students are on track to achieve considerably better results this year, particularly in English. Standards look to be above average overall. There was some slower progress amongst Year 9 students in 2008, particularly in English, but improvements are evident at this level too, and students are set to achieve some challenging targets. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the Castle Unit and in the off-site centre also make the same progress as their peers and sometimes better. This is because they are given well-targeted support and are made to feel included in all school and unit activities. Students in the construction unit make outstanding progress because of the relevance of the course to suit their aspirations and the support given.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students develop good personal skills and good relationships flourish throughout. Students' enthusiasm for college is reflected in good rates of attendance and the wholehearted participation in contributing to the college and wider community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are encouraged to think about others and they fund raise extensively for charitable causes, including helping each other to go on expensive trips such as to the Arctic. Sixth formers are particularly good role models in this respect, initiating and organising fund raising activities and local events. Students have a good understanding of their place in the world and their responsibilities as global citizens. Students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is good. For the most part, students behave sensibly and thoughtfully towards each other. Teachers normally manage well any potentially disruptive behaviour, but there are a few occasions when the behaviour policy is not consistently applied. Students say that they feel safe, and that they have confidence that any bullying will be dealt with effectively. They know their views will be listened to and respected and they enjoy being able to have a say in the new appointment of teachers and in further developing the behaviour policy. Links with the local and global communities are well fostered through the college technology status and, as a result, the students are well prepared for the next stages of their education or the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. The college has put in place strategies to iron out inconsistencies, which are starting to have a positive impact. In this respect, lead teachers within the specialist college have been in the forefront of teaching and learning developments. In the most effective lessons, students are challenged by tasks which meet their individual needs and a brisk pace of learning keeps students on their toes. Increasingly, challenging targets are being set. This is 'raising the game' for everyone and students are relishing the opportunities to excel. Many lessons involve a range of interesting tasks and activities which both enthuse and motivate students. As a result, learning in most lessons is both purposeful and meaningful. Some outstanding practice was observed. In one Year 10 French lesson, the teacher's confident approach, quick-fire questioning and careful management of the learning encouraged students to think quickly and search for answers independently of the teacher. Less effective teaching offers students fewer opportunities to work in this way, and means they are too reliant on the teacher for answers and knowing how to improve their work. Most students work hard and concentrate well. Teaching assistants are generally well used to ensure all students feel included, supported and confident to achieve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The college provides an outstanding curriculum that matches the needs and aspirations of its students and makes a major contribution to their learning and personal development. This is especially so for students whose needs would not necessarily be met entirely by the National Curriculum. The courses offered at the construction unit for work-related qualifications are outstanding. This results in students who are focused, intent on enjoying and achieving their

best, have improved attendance and show a strong work ethic. The provision for more academically biased students is equally outstanding with a wide range of courses to choose from which include vocational options. The college has used its technology status well to develop extensive links with local industry, local colleges and universities further afield. There is a varied range of opportunities to become involved in schools and organisations in other countries and trips to support ecological and ethical issues. Students enjoy the sporting activities and other college clubs on offer to them and take advantage of extra homework and study clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good arrangements for the care, guidance and support of all students are threaded through all aspects of the college's work. Arrangements for the safeguarding and safety of all students are robust and rigorously enforced; policies are reviewed regularly to meet best practice. Good procedures support students' attendance and ensure that this is given a high priority. The staff are caring and will, as one parent said, 'go the extra mile' to make sure that students feel well supported. There are improving systems to support learning, ensuring that students understand what they need to do to improve. Some oral feedback by staff to students and marking are good but this is not consistent and students are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal and his senior leadership team have a passion and drive that has clearly set a direction for sustained improvement. The outstanding curriculum in the main school and the inclusive mission to ensure every individual feels important have a clear impact on personal development, improving standards and staff morale. Decisions taken recently have not always been popular with a small minority of parents but the large majority are supportive of change. Efforts to meet parents through forum evenings have been thwarted by poor attendance. Nevertheless, the college is keen to try other initiatives to improve communication and its speed of response to parents' concerns. The college is proactive in developing strong community links and has completed a thorough audit. It has good knowledge of its strengths and areas for improvement. This is complemented well by a challenging yet supportive governing body. Governors play a significant part in college improvement, acting as good critical friends. Good pastoral leadership ensures that students develop well personally and, through the 'learning to learn' programme, develop skills for life. Middle managers are becoming increasingly accountable but not all analyse data with sufficient rigour or use the information to set explicit enough targets for how to improve teaching and learning. The college is updating its central academic data tracking program to ensure that information is easily available to all teachers. Resources are well deployed and there are extensive and effective links with local services.

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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	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	3
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	

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

21 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Launceston College, Launceston, PL15 9JN

Thank you for welcoming us to your college and especially to those students who took the time to talk to us and show us around. We enjoyed hearing your views on how you think the college is improving, what could be better and how it is helping you to reach higher standards. We were impressed with what your student council has been able to achieve and enjoyed hearing about all the exciting trips that you are able to go on. We think that the leadership of the principal and his team is good and, while in some people's eyes, they have made some strict rules, most of you told us that this was actually helping you to learn better. We think that heads of departments are setting you more challenging targets but could look at your progress data in even more detail to help with their planning. You have worked hard to attain standards that are above average by the time you reach Year 11 and are just above average in Year 9. You are achieving well and we thought that behaviour was good overall. We were pleased to hear that your behaviour policy is making learning easier and hope that you will all continue to behave as well as you can.

The good care and guidance provided for you develops your personal skills well and we could see how your attendance has improved so that it is now good. We were impressed with the attitudes of students in the sixth form and this is having a positive impact in improving standards that were falling. Now standards are just about average and you are achieving satisfactorily. Teaching is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. Some teachers need to give you more information on how you can help yourselves to improve. The curriculum is outstanding in the main school giving you a far better range of opportunities than in many other schools. This gives you a head start, preparing you well for the next stage of your life. The curriculum is good and improving in the sixth form. You have a good awareness of how to stay safe and live healthily.

So that the college can continue with its improvement, we have asked it to:

- improve standards in the sixth form so that you can achieve well
- check that heads of departments are using data really well to provide you with more support to improve your progress
- give you more opportunities to work independently and more information so you know what to do to improve.

You as students have a significant role to play in this improvement, especially by making sure that all of you have good attitudes to learning.

I wish you every success for your futures.

Caroline McKee

Lead inspector