

Noel-Baker Community School and Language College

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 112992 |
| Local Authority | City of Derby |
| Inspection number | 325736 |
| Inspection dates | 19–20 November 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Matharu HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1384 |
| Sixth form | 149 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Freda Daniel |
| Headteacher | Mrs Margaret Eley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2 November 2005 |
| School address | Bracknell Drive Alvaston Derby Derbyshire DE24 0BR |
| Telephone number | 01332 572 026 |
| Fax number | 01332 573 654 |

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Noel-Baker Community School and Language College is a popular school. A large proportion of students come from areas of relatively high social and economic deprivation. It is well above the average size for a secondary school, although the sixth form is small. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The majority of students are White British. Overall, the proportions of students with English as an additional language and of students from minority ethnic backgrounds are below national averages. The school gained specialist language status in September 2004.

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 improving school. Although standards are below national averages, given students' below average starting points on joining Year 7, they make good progress overall during their time at the school. This is due to predominantly good teaching and a sharp focus on identifying and addressing the lower achievement previously evident in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Despite improvements made at Key Stage 3 over recent years, which resulted in good progress here, the percentage of students gaining a good pass in GCSE English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 was below average. The school has made great strides forward in tackling this issue. Careful analysis was made of the contributory issues, together with a continued focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, progress improved in 2008 and moved the school beyond the national challenge benchmark for English and mathematics passes at GCSE. Current progress levels indicate that these improvements are continuing, although the school acknowledges that this is an ongoing priority in order to establish an upward trend.

Students' personal development and well-being, including behaviour are good. They appreciate that their views are listened to; Year 9 students commented positively on the fact that when they are asked about how to improve things, for example in the English curriculum, they feel valued and involved in the running of their school. A very small number of parents returned questionnaires during the inspection. Of those who did respond, the majority were happy with most aspects of the school's provision.

A significant factor in the school's improvement drive is the close attention paid to improving teaching and learning. This has created a team approach, resulting in a shared sense of purpose. Most teachers are comfortable in using progress information to track performance, although they are less confident in using this routinely to base their planning of teaching and learning. The curriculum in the main school is good with increasingly varied options available from 14 onwards. Whilst the sixth form curriculum is also good, the wider enrichment programme is limited. Students right across the school are well cared for and supported strongly to help them achieve as well as possible. Academic guidance has improved considerably since the last inspection with a range of suitable interventions used effectively to boost progress.

Senior leaders hold a strong conviction that focussed and cohesive teams at all levels will produce the capacity needed to deliver improvements to students' educational outcomes. This has prompted considerable investment in leadership training, which in turn has brought about effective shared leadership across the school. Consequently, leaders at all levels understand their roles in raising achievement and feel they have an important part to play in whole school improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Although standards in 2007 were below national averages, standards in 2008 and current tracking data confirm that these are steadily improving. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades A/B, while still below average, is also improving. The proportion achieving grades A-E in 2007 was in line with national averages. Therefore, from a below average position on entry to the sixth form, achievement is good overall, students leaving with broadly average standards. The school has

recognised that standards in some subjects remain below average and is taking appropriate action to remedy this.

Students' personal development is good. They attend regularly in response to careful monitoring, contribute well to the school and enjoy life in the sixth form. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. The curriculum matches the needs and aspirations of students and is developing well. Care and guidance are effective; students speak highly of the support they receive. The use of assessment to track progress against targets is regular and accurate. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The curriculum enrichment programme, which, whilst generally satisfactory, is in need of review in order to consider greater opportunities for physical education in addition to improving the provision for religious education and citizenship.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate on the recent improvements in achievement in the core subjects at Key Stage 4 in order to ensure that students reach their targets
- Ensure that teachers use assessment data consistently when planning teaching and learning
- Improve the programme of enrichment in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good overall. Based upon 2007 results, standards were well below average at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE. The school's ambitious targets in 2008 were not met at the end of Year 9 in mathematics and science, but were exceeded in English. GCSE results have shown gradual improvement in recent years but in 2007 and 2008 were still below national averages. The proportion of students achieving five higher grades, including English and mathematics, remains well below average but is steadily improving, and exceeded the national challenge base-line in 2008. Strong evidence, from lesson observations during the inspection, recent assessments and good tracking data, indicates that the improvement of 2008 is being sustained, including the proportion of students on track to gain five good passes including English and mathematics and in grades A*/A. Current tracking indicates that students are on course to exceed the school's ambitious targets for 2009.

In 2007, achievement in Years 7 to 9 was good. Evidence provided by the school, coupled with unvalidated test results from 2008, shows that this good level of progress was maintained in 2008 and is on track to continue in 2009. Good progress was observed in lessons because students were consistently challenged through relevant learning activities. Historically, the problem has been with the relative lack of progress made from Year 9 to 11. The school is aware that achievement overall from Year 7 to Year 11 was disappointing in 2007 and has tackled this situation with vigour. The unvalidated data shows improvement in 2008. Further, school monitoring evidence clearly shows that achievement is now good in both key stages. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similarly good progress throughout the school. For example, of these students, almost all left for an educational or training placement last year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are proud of their school and enjoy their time here. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Students are playing a growing role in the life of the school as their confidence in their own abilities improves. They are pleased to receive rewards and praise, and view this as an important part of school life. The award-winning school council functions well and, along with year group councils, ensures that student views are increasingly heard. This leads to improvements, for example in the quality of lunchtime food. Students are now developing their role to have a greater say in influencing teaching and learning. They are increasingly getting involved in community life outside school, for example, through the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the council's work with community groups. Students' cultural development is good, especially through the success of regular drama productions and a number of links with other schools abroad. Students understand about keeping healthy and uptake for sports is good. Numbers purchasing a school lunch have increased but their willingness to eat healthily at break and lunchtime is variable. Their awareness of personal safety is good, especially through the individual support and guidance they receive from staff.

Behaviour is good. This has improved considerably since the last inspection. Challenging behaviour is dealt with well, as the school's impressive track record of few exclusions confirms. Students verify that any incidents of bullying are taken seriously and handled well. Thoughtful assemblies promoting Anti-Bullying Week helped them to realise and appreciate everyone's differences. Students are active fundraisers and work hard to raise a considerable amount, including annual amounts for an anti-bullying charity. They leave well prepared for their future lives, because careers education and guidance is tailored carefully to their needs. Students have an impressive array of skills, including the confident use of information and communication technology (ICT), which equip them well for their future working lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good so students learn well. In the best lessons, teaching has pace and challenges students to think for themselves. As a result, students make good progress, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers and other adults in the classroom are skilled at getting students to work well together, share ideas and help develop each other's understanding and confidence. This has a positive impact upon their personal development as well as the gains in learning. In an outstanding Year 9 English lesson, students were repeatedly challenged to engage in a critical analysis of a text. This resulted in mature responses and levels of language use well beyond the expectations for their age. Consequently, their enjoyment and pride in their achievements were clear. A wide variety of activities stimulates students' interest and ensures they stay engaged in their learning. ICT is used well in many lessons, to not only provide high quality resources in the classroom but also as an effective learning tool. Marking is largely helpful in making clear to students what they have to do to improve and target setting provides them with a clear focus on how to reach higher standards. However, in less effective lessons, too much teacher direction and the lack of co-operative, challenging learning means that interest flags, students lose their focus and progress is slower.

Whilst data is used well to track performance, the use of assessment data to closely inform teaching is underdeveloped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is regularly reviewed and the recent sharp focus upon English and mathematics has brought about improvements in standards. The school has also successfully piloted new thematic approaches at Key Stage 3 that emphasise creative approaches to learning. Vocational provision has expanded at Key Stage 4 and this is now a strength of the school. Consequently, the wide range of needs and interests of pupils are met well and they make good progress. Many pupils take advantage of the good residential study and 'Family and Out of Lesson' support programmes. The school is extending its international links, and standards in languages, which have declined over the last few years due to staffing problems, are beginning to rise as part of its specialist status. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes are under development. The school provides a good range of extracurricular activities that are well attended and have a positive impact upon students' personal development and mostly good attitudes to learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students flourish in an environment that considers their individual welfare needs as top priority. Of particular note are the outstanding partnerships forged with a wide range of external support agencies. This means that students, some of whom have very individual and complex needs, are well supported. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities benefit hugely from a very good level of support. A range of different approaches and initiatives, together with a staff willingness to seek out exactly the right programme for each student, means their personal, social and academic needs are well catered for. Improvements to the levels of care and attention each student receives are attributable to the high quality work of year managers, who know their students well. They are always available for students or their parents and relationships with parents are good as a result.

The guidance students receive helping them to improve their performance has improved considerably, and is now good. A whole range of support and mentoring systems is in place, and those at danger of underachieving are quickly identified. One notable example of this encouragement to do better is through the residential trip to Derbyshire, where a group of Year 11 students enjoy adventure activities, combined with intensive bursts of English and mathematics.

Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work in school are fully in place. Day-to-day child protection procedures are good because staff are vigilant and have a good degree of experience and expertise. However, some policies are not reviewed regularly enough and roles and responsibilities for health and safety procedures lack definition.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. There has been good progress on the issues arising from the previous inspection. The school is being led capably by the acting headteacher. There

are many strengths evident in the senior leadership team. This team has a clear and realistic grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders across the school demonstrate a range of expertise, are well organised strategically and articulate the vision for the school well.

There is a strong emphasis on staff development and good sharing of internal expertise, which enables all staff to contribute to the school's improvement agenda. Many do so; the keenness to participate in the teaching and learning improvement group is indicative of this. The use of the school's advanced skills teachers in leading the training of newly qualified teachers is a good use of internal expertise and shares best practice effectively. A range of coaching and mentoring partnerships is proving to be useful in improving teaching to a good level. The school improvement group is a powerful driving force in the school. This has successfully distributed leadership to a wider group of middle leaders. Consequently, these leaders feel empowered in their roles and the mood and morale of the wider staff is generally positive.

The pressing need to raise achievement at Key Stage 4 prompted the school to pay close attention to the importance of tracking students' progress accurately. This information is now used well to identify underachievement and plan suitable interventions. This has clearly had an impact on results, particularly in English and mathematics in 2008, where a range of interventions boosted performance to be more in line with expectations. The systematic use of tracking data continues to highlight aspects of underperformance. Curriculum leaders are good at implementing interventions to boost progress.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is robust and accurate. The system of regular departmental reviews provides accurate information about the quality of work in each department and results in clear recommendations for future action. Members of the leadership team work effectively with curriculum leaders, providing good challenge and support for further improvement. Governance is good. Governors support the school, and know its strengths and weaknesses but also hold it suitably to account. Given the recent improvements made and clarity of planning, there is good capacity to improve further.

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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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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? | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 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? | 2 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 | |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | |
| 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 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 |

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 eliminated | 2 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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 | |

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

21 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Noel-Baker Community School and Language College, Derby, DE24 0BR

Thank you for your contributions to your school's recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting many of you and hearing your views. We found that the quality of education provided by your school is good overall. Since the last inspection in 2005, a number of things have improved. Standards are rising and most of you are currently making good progress with your work. Everyone in school is working hard to drive up results, particularly in the GCSE results in Year 11, which we are pleased to note are steadily improving.

Your behaviour in lessons and around school is good and many of you commented to us how much this has improved. Most of you enjoy learning and feel a sense of pride in your school. You are well taught - we saw some very interesting, lively lessons where you clearly enjoy good relationships with your teachers and appreciate the wide variety of activities included in lessons. You told us that you like lessons where you can get involved, with plenty of discussions and lots of practical opportunities. You also told us that you appreciate it when you are asked your views about how improvements might be made and we have discussed this with your school. You are cared for well in school and your individual needs are carefully considered in providing the right curriculum for you, as you get older. We also found that there are many good leaders in your school who work together well to improve learning and make sure you achieve your best.

We know that your school leaders and all of the staff at Noel-Baker want to continue to improve even more. We have asked them to-

- Ensure that results in English and maths in Year11 continue to improve
- Check that all teachers are using information about your current progress to plan their lessons, so that this helps you to move on quickly to the next level
- Improve the sixth form enrichment programme to make sure a wider range of subjects is covered

You can help by working hard and setting your sights high, especially in those English and maths GCSE's! We feel sure that the improvements made here will continue and wish you every success in the future.

Best wishes

Judith Matharu

Her Majesty's Inspector