

The Lancaster School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120283
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	327247
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1091
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Greenwood
Headteacher	Russell Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Knighton Lane East Leicester LE2 6FU
Telephone number	01162 703176
Fax number	01162 448513

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The Lancaster School is larger than average and attracts students from a high number of primary schools. The school population is diverse with an above average proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is of Indian heritage with many others represented. For many students English is an additional language with a few at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above average. The proportion eligible for free school meals is broadly average.

The school gained specialist status for sport in 2000, and added art in 2005. The school has experienced recruitment difficulties and a high number of staff changes in recent years. The headteacher has been in post since Easter 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Lancaster is a satisfactory school with notable strengths in specialist sport and arts subjects. This is demonstrated in an extensive range of courses and opportunities, rising levels of attainment in these subjects, and excellent collaborative and community activities. For example, Midnight Madness is a successful and popular football project run in liaison with the police to provide supervised activity in the evening. The school is rightly proud of the quality of its choir and sporting achievements, which have gained national recognition.

Since the previous inspection senior leaders have worked hard to minimise the impact of staff changes, absence and recruitment difficulties which have disrupted the learning and personal development of students. As a result there has been a varied pattern of performance in recent years. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are broadly average and students make satisfactory progress, overall. This disguises differences in progress between subjects, groups of learners and individuals. Despite high levels of support and intervention in mathematics, a trend of very low standards and unsatisfactory progress has resulted from significant staff turnover and weaknesses in teaching and leadership. In 2008, this led to a below average proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Leaders have taken effective steps to stabilise and strengthen staffing in mathematics to tackle the legacy of underachievement. Students who find learning more difficult and those at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language achieve well because of good intervention that supports them and has a good impact on their progress.

Leadership and management, and the capacity to improve, are satisfactory. Senior leaders have satisfactory systems to evaluate the school's work through regular reviews of progress and procedures to check on the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders recognise that these are not yet sufficiently embedded, coordinated or robust to ensure that leaders at all levels make a strong contribution to improvement. This explains inconsistencies in the school's work. Variation is shown in the quality of teaching and learning, which is satisfactory overall but ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Students are not always sufficiently engaged in their learning. Inconsistencies exist in the use of assessment for lesson planning, and in checking that tasks meet the learning needs of students. Where teaching is good or better, students are attentive and respond positively to the variety of tasks that engage and interest them. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory but there is wide variation in the quality of marking and feedback students receive on how to improve their work.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. There is harmony between boys of different races, but their cultures are not sufficiently shared and celebrated. Leaders acknowledge that a significant minority of learners are not achieving as well as expected as a result of persistent absence, poor behaviour and attitudes to learning. Although the large majority of students behave well, show respect and participate enthusiastically in school, too many lessons are affected by low-level disruption with incidences of unacceptable behaviour that are reflected in high levels of exclusion. New approaches to the management of behaviour have supported improvement but monitoring is not rigorous enough to eliminate inconsistencies. The curriculum is good and has strengthened in response to the needs of students; effective pathways have been created to provide opportunities for successful outcomes. The impact of curricular developments along with more vocational courses have not yet been realised in improved standards.

Staff are fully committed to the care of students. An extensive range of support programmes, complemented by good partnership links with external agencies, for example the special needs and education psychology service, helps to meet the changing behavioural, social and emotional needs of students. Success is shown in improved attendance, now at the national average, and examples of students who respond well to personal support programmes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the whole-school behaviour for learning policy is implemented consistently well through regular and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.
- Improve standards and achievement across the school, especially in mathematics, through consistent use of assessment information to plan tasks that provide a better match to students' learning needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through greater pace and challenge, better use of assessment in lessons to check learning, and regular feedback to students on the quality of their work and how to improve.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels contribute effectively to quality assurance activities, check progress regularly, and use the outcomes for improvement.
- Ensure that work to promote community cohesion and equalities is effectively coordinated, and evaluated regularly to support improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Boys enter the school with attainment which is broadly average overall compared with boys nationally, but below average in English. The progress they make in Years 7 to 9 is slower than in Years 10 and 11. This results in below average standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 4. Students of Indian heritage performed particularly well in 2008, with 61% achieving five or more higher grade passes including English and mathematics. Specialist subjects have a positive impact upon standards, supported by a wide range of qualifications on offer in these areas.

In lessons there are pockets of good and outstanding progress but this is not a consistent picture across the school. A range of strategies have been introduced, including catch-up sessions, individual mentoring and revision sessions for targeted students in Year 11. Consequently, current progress shows some improvement as indicated by teacher assessments; this was also evidenced in some lessons, including in English and science. Challenging targets are set, but in recent years not always achieved. Good whole-school systems are in place to collect and analyse assessment information regularly, but the programme of meetings between senior and middle leaders is not sufficiently well structured to ensure a sharp focus on the tracking of progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students participate in many sporting activities and enjoy the benefits of the sports specialism to the full. As a result they know what being healthy means and do much to practise a healthy

lifestyle. Their attitude to learning is satisfactory overall, but varies depending on the level of challenge and range of activities they encounter in lessons. Students say that they feel safe in school; they know who to go to for help and support. They contribute willingly and successfully to charitable events to help the school and the community. The school council is often instrumental in initiating and organising these events.

Some emphasis is given in assemblies and religious studies to students' spiritual development, and there are several cultural activities and opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity, but spiritual and cultural elements are not widespread in the school or built into the curriculum. There are missed opportunities to utilise the wide range of ethnic backgrounds that are present to enrich experiences.

Students' moral and social development and their learning are affected by their behaviour and attendance. Attendance has just reached a satisfactory point in line with the national average, but there remain a high number of persistent absentees. Unsatisfactory behaviour by a minority of boys is an issue in some classrooms and around the school, and is of concern to some students. Exclusions are rising, despite a range of stringent sanctions, an internal exclusion facility and an on-call system, due to inconsistencies in the implementation of procedures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers generally communicate learning objectives clearly to students. They have strong subject knowledge and use information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance lesson presentation. The full spectrum of outstanding to inadequate lessons was seen by inspectors. Inconsistency exists in the effectiveness of teachers' planning and the variety of tasks provided to meet the needs of the wide range of ability groups. Students are aware of their current levels and know their targets, but often do not know what they have to do in order to reach them. Teachers are increasingly using assessment data to aid their planning and set targets. However, this practice is not yet sufficiently embedded to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can. Where teaching is weak, learning is often disrupted through poor behaviour, and students who are more able are not sufficiently challenged or encouraged to work as independently as they could. Where teaching is stronger, lessons are well paced with appropriate challenge supported by regular feedback. The students are therefore enthused and encouraged in their learning, and this results in good progress. In most lessons, relationships between teachers and students are positive. The monitoring of teaching and learning quality is improving well with a stronger focus on progress, challenge, routines and assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been strengthened, for example by allocating additional time for the teaching of English in Year 7 and for literacy support. Students develop secure competence in workplace and enterprise skills through the work of the alternative curriculum unit, which meets the needs of those who become disaffected with education. The school has worked hard and is beginning to be successful in the process of re-engaging this group of students. An expansion of courses in Key Stage 4, particularly linked to sport, creative arts and vocational subjects, is successful in providing pathways to support progression, in addition to college courses.

An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities ensures that students can develop a range of sporting, artistic, aesthetic and cultural skills. These are highly valued by students and are taken up by a significant number. Additional accreditation is achieved by many via Duke of Edinburgh awards and other coaching awards. Personal development days, covering themes such as business enterprise, enrich the curriculum. These are an integral part of a well-structured programme of personal, social and health education. The strong impact of specialist status in sports and art is evident in outreach work with local primary schools, improved ICT resources and community links.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff are fully committed to the care of students and give much time and effort to help and support them. These efforts are appreciated by the students, particularly those who are vulnerable or need extra help with their learning. A good example is the group of students who speak English as an additional language, who make very good progress thanks to staff focusing on individual needs, support from parents and the community, and careful monitoring. Good transition arrangements are valued by parents. Effective links with support agencies have led to an improvement in overall attendance although persistent absence remains high. All requirements with respect to safeguarding students' welfare and child protection are met.

In matters of guidance on their learning, however, students are not served so well. No settled or consistent arrangements apply to tutor time, apart from in Year 7, so that expectations set by teachers are too variable at the start of the day. Marking and assessment of students' work are not carried out in the same way across different subjects. Progress is hampered by the fact that students are not sufficiently guided on how to improve, and do not receive consistent messages from teachers about handwriting and presentation and care over spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides clear direction for the school and is well supported by the senior team. Recent staff changes have been used effectively to adjust roles to provide a stronger focus on teaching, learning and achievement. There are good features of leadership, for example developments linked to partnerships, specialist areas and the curriculum, but not all middle leaders fully contribute to the school's improvement.

Although the school's self-evaluation is over-generous, there is a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement, and the need to strengthen consistency in line with best practice. There are effective links to planning at whole-school and department level although action plans do not include precise detail about how actions are to be monitored, or effectiveness evaluated. Staff, students and parents agree that improving behaviour remains a priority as a significant minority of students do not routinely meet the school's expectations.

Governors are gaining an increasingly accurate understanding of the school's work through department visits, scrutiny of performance information and regular meetings to increase their contribution to self-evaluation. A weaker aspect is that they do not ensure key policies around community cohesion, and equalities are reviewed and monitored regularly to identify areas for further improvement. Although there are many good features in practice in the school, such

as the way different racial groups interact and the extensive range of community activities, this work is not sufficiently coordinated or evaluated.

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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
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

19 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Lancaster School, Leicester LE2 6FU

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were impressed with the sensible and mature contribution you made to discussions about aspects of the school's work. You were particularly pleased to be attending a specialist school for sport because of the many additional opportunities on offer to keep you fit and to develop your skills. You were rightly proud of the success of the choir and the opportunity to perform in London. Staff care about you a great deal and work very hard to support those of you who have difficulties. You told us that you appreciate this very much. You show your commitment to others through the charity and community work you do, such as helping out in primary schools.

Many of you were keen to tell us what you enjoyed about the school, but you were also honest and constructive about what you felt needed to improve further. We decided that Lancaster was a satisfactory school with a mixture of strengths and aspects that needed more work. The quality of lessons varies a great deal and although there are some good lessons, too many are not sufficiently planned to challenge and interest you, or to meet individual learning needs. The guidance you receive on your work does not always provide enough information on how to improve.

Most of you behave well and want to learn, but we agree with you that not all students have responsible attitudes and cooperate in class. This disrupts weaker lessons and prevents students from learning properly. We have asked the school to monitor the new behaviour policy carefully to check that it is being applied by all staff. You have a good range of courses to follow which provide a better match to your needs and interests, and help you to be more successful in school. We have also asked all the school's leaders to work together to check on progress, and to help raise standards and achievement, especially in mathematics, which has been badly affected by staff changes in recent years.

You all need to play your part and to take responsibility for improving your school to make it a place where everyone has a chance to succeed. Attend every day, take responsibility for your behaviour, and think about what you are learning in class and what you need to do to improve.

Our very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Nada Trikić

Her Majesty's Inspector