

The City of Leicester College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120297
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	327249
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1416
Sixth form	325
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Vaughan-Jones
Headteacher	Anne Gregory
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Downing Drive Evington Leicester LE5 6LN
Telephone number	0116 2413984
Fax number	0116 2416728

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2008
Inspection number	327249

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The college is bigger than most secondary schools. It has been a specialist college for business and enterprise since September 2003 and was successfully redesignated in September 2007. The student population is very diverse, with the largest groups coming from Indian, White British, Pakistani, other Asian, Black Caribbean or mixed backgrounds. Over 30 different languages are spoken, and the proportion of those in the early stages of learning English is well above average. More students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. A higher proportion than average are eligible for free school meals. In the absence of the substantive headteacher, the deputy headteacher has been acting headteacher since September 2006 and some other senior staff are also in acting roles because of this. The college has gained numerous quality marks and awards from national bodies.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The college provides students with a satisfactory education. Some elements of its work are good, including students' personal development and well-being, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and the sixth form and its promotion of community cohesion. The diverse cultures, faiths and backgrounds of students and staff, and the college's extensive activities within and beyond its boundaries, are doing much to promote racial harmony and positive relationships. There is a strong commitment to including all students in the work and life of the college, which is reflected in its Inclusion Quality Mark.

Standards are broadly average by Year 11 and Year 13. Students' achievement is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. The GCSE examination results have been broadly average on most measures since the last inspection. The results at five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics improved between 2007 and 2008 but the college's data suggest that they will remain below average. The results in mathematics improved in 2008 but declined in English and especially in science. Students make satisfactory progress between Years 7 and 11, although it is slower in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. The college is working hard, with some success, to reduce the discrepancies in the results between different subjects and amongst different groups of students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not receive sufficient support and make inadequate progress as their needs are not identified early enough.

The good curriculum, enhanced by initiatives through the college's specialism in business and enterprise, provides students with a wide range of academic and vocational opportunities. The excellent range of enrichment activities extends students' experiences and contributes well to their personal development, preparing them effectively for their future lives. Close attention has been paid to improving the quality of teaching, which is beginning to pay dividends in ensuring better learning in lessons, although this is not yet reflected in improved test and examination results. The college's specialist areas have been instrumental in leading this work. Students are set targets but they are not used consistently to stretch students further. Checks on their progress are not always rigorous or systematic enough.

Most students clearly enjoy their education. Their personal development is good and is enhanced by the good relationships between students and with staff, together with the good quality of care and support they receive. The majority of students behave well, but a small minority do not conform to the college's expectations. Students have a good awareness of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. They contribute effectively to the college and wider community.

The acting headteacher, ably supported by her two deputy headteachers, leads and manages the college well. Together, they have implemented several initiatives to meet students' needs more effectively and to improve standards in some of the weaker subjects and other aspects of the college's work. These developments are already making a difference but not consistently across the college. Some middle leaders undertake their responsibilities well but others are less effective, especially in driving through improvements. Governors are supportive but do not do enough to monitor the college's work and hold it to account. As a result, leadership and management are satisfactory overall, as is the college's capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides students with a good education and prepares them well for the future. Standards at the end of Year 13 are broadly average, and reflected in the A-level examination results. Students achieve well. Effective teaching enables students to make good progress, although it is more secure in Year 13 than in Year 12. Relationships between students and their teachers are extremely positive and students value the good quality mentoring and support they receive. Students are set rigorous targets and their progress is monitored carefully. The planning of lessons is good, but in some lessons, students are not encouraged to contribute their ideas enough and do not have sufficient opportunities to learn independently. The good curriculum is innovative, with a wide range of courses at various levels. Its flexibility enables it to respond effectively to the needs of different students.

Students' personal development is good. They contribute well to college life and act as good role models for other students. They feel they have a strong voice in the college's development. Their attendance is not as high as in the rest of the college and not all students arrive punctually to lessons. The monitoring of these aspects is insufficiently robust. The sixth form is led and managed well. Senior leaders give clear direction to its work. Much monitoring takes place but this information is not analysed rigorously enough to inform future developments.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, identifying their needs and providing them with appropriate support at an earlier stage.
- Sharpen the role of some middle leaders to ensure that they raise standards and achievement to the level of the most successful subjects.
- Ensure greater consistency in the setting of realistic but challenging targets and monitor students' progress towards meeting them rigorously and systematically.

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 the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards by Year 11 are broadly average. This is reflected in the GCSE results, which have been close to the average since the last inspection. The proportion of students gaining five or more grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations in 2008 was lower than in 2006 and 2007, when they were above average. However, there was an increase in the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, although the results are likely to remain below average. Students' attainment when they start school is slightly below average but weaknesses in their literacy, especially writing, skills affect their learning, especially in Years 7 to 9. From their starting points, students make satisfactory progress between Year 7 and Year 11, although it is more assured in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. The college's results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were below average in 2007 and declined in 2008, especially in mathematics and science. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make inadequate progress as their needs are not identified early enough and they do not receive sufficient support. Most of those who were entered for the Year 9 national tests a year early made good progress. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students clearly enjoy college, shown in their good levels of attendance, their participation in extra-curricular activities and extensive involvement in the college and wider community. Their moral, social and cultural development is good, and stronger than their spiritual development, which is satisfactory. They develop well as young citizens, and relationships within the college are positive and supportive. Most behave well around the college and in lessons. However, the high number of exclusions in the past, although reducing considerably so far this year because of the college's approach, together with some low-level disruption in some lessons, means that behaviour is only satisfactory overall.

Students have a good understanding of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles through the college's initiatives in this area. Students say they feel safe, and acknowledge that staff will take swift action if they have any concerns. They are well equipped for their future lives through the extensive range of enterprise and work-related opportunities initiated through the college's specialism, the variety of relevant GCSE and other courses, and the development of a range of personal skills. However, relative weaknesses in their literacy and numeracy skills mean that this aspect of their personal development is good rather than outstanding. Students' contribution to the community is strong, with many contributing to a wide range of projects in the college and elsewhere. These include fund raising for charity, activities with local primary schools and other settings, social enterprise events under the Young Chamber programme, as well as a number of international links.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The strong emphasis placed on improving its consistency, together with regular and detailed classroom observation as part of performance management and subject reviews, is paying dividends in ensuring that students benefit from good teaching. In addition, some effective teaching and learning approaches and assessment arrangements in the vocational subjects, developed through the college's specialism, are being shared more widely across the college. They are having a positive impact on developing students' skills in learning independently in Years 7 to 11 and in helping them to assess their own work and that of others. As a result, the good teaching is leading to better learning in lessons, although this is not yet reflected in improved test and examination results.

Teachers use their good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements to provide students with a good variety of activities that build sequentially on each other. On occasions, the transitions between the activities are not handled as well as they might and the work is not always matched well enough to the students' needs. The positive relationships in most lessons encourage and motivate students to work productively. Lessons generally proceed at a good pace, ensuring that the time available for learning is used effectively. Many students lack confidence in their ability to speak and contribute to the lesson, with the result that teachers sometimes talk for too long rather than encouraging extended contributions from the students. In a few lessons, especially with some of the younger students, low-level chatter reduces the rate of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students experience a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs well, although there is insufficient emphasis on developing their literacy and numeracy skills across subjects. The college's specialism in business and enterprise is benefiting students considerably, especially in the wide range of work-related activities and enterprise education activities they undertake. Recent curricular developments, including the introduction of a wider range of vocational courses, have been innovative and extensive, and many students are already reaping the benefit.

The condensed curriculum in Key Stage 3 enables the majority of students to take the National Curriculum tests early in Year 8. It also allows additional time in Year 9 for students to extend their learning skills through a range of cross-curricular activities. In Key Stage 4, a variety of pathways, including academic and vocational courses, with opportunities for progression in the college's specialist subjects, enables students to gain relevant qualifications. An excellent range of enrichment opportunities, including many visits to support learning and extend students' horizons, makes a significant contribution to the students' enjoyment of learning and to their personal development. These are supplemented by a good variety of extra-curricular activities and an effective programme for citizenship and personal, social and health education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The college provides good pastoral care for students, the vast majority of whom know that staff will give them effective support should they have any personal or academic problems. Many students recognise how their attendance and behaviour have improved because of their teachers' support. Safeguarding, child protection and health and safety arrangements are thorough. The college recognises rightly that the additional needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not identified early enough and the support they receive is insufficient to enable them to make similar progress to other students. This situation is under review by senior staff. Students value the good advice and guidance they receive on choosing their courses and in preparing them for the next stage of their education.

The systems to set targets for students are not used rigorously and consistently by all staff to measure students' progress. Some of the targets are unrealistic, showing that some staff have an unclear understanding of how the targets can help students make faster progress. The college's achievement coordinators are developing their roles in tracking and monitoring students' progress but the processes are not focused sharply enough to raise achievement substantially.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher, with the effective support of the two deputy headteachers, leads the college well. Together, they have established a clear direction for the college's future growth and implemented many improvements, especially to the curriculum, teaching and learning, and students' attendance and behaviour. Some developments are still being embedded throughout the college, but many are already having a beneficial impact. Senior staff have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development, although their view of

the effectiveness of aspects of the college's work is too generous at times. Nevertheless, they have identified the right priorities for making further improvements, especially in raising standards and achievement further. The acting headteacher rightly recognises the need to make the college improvement plan into a sharper document so that it becomes a robust management and evaluation tool.

The innovative work of the college's business and enterprise specialism has been instrumental in showing the way forward for other faculties. Many middle leaders are developing their areas well but practice across the college is inconsistent. As a result, leadership and management overall are satisfactory rather than good. Senior staff are taking firm action to address areas of weakness in order to improve provision. The college's contribution to community cohesion is good. Relationships with parents and other organisations are positive, but few parents returned the inspection questionnaire. Governors undertake their responsibilities satisfactorily but do not do enough to hold the college to account for its performance.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3	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	3	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
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	2
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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**

17 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The City of Leicester College, Leicester, LE5 6LN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed our visit, and our discussions with many of you helped us in our work. This letter is to tell you of our findings. I hope that many of you will take the opportunity to read the full report.

The college provides you with a satisfactory education. Some aspects of its work are good, for example the sixth form, teaching and learning, and the curriculum, as well as your personal development and well-being. The college is helping you to develop into responsible young people and preparing you well for your future lives. Most of you have positive attitudes to the college and to learning, and clearly enjoy what it offers you. You make a good contribution to the college, as well as to the wider community, through the many activities that you undertake. This means that the college makes a good contribution to promoting community cohesion.

Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 11 and Year 13. Most of you make satisfactory progress in the main school, although those of you with additional learning needs do not make as much progress as you should because you do not have enough support. Students in the sixth form make good progress and achieve well. The good teaching ensures that you have work that interests and motivates you and is suitably matched to your needs. Not all of you behave as well as the majority of students and too many of you have had to be excluded in the past, although the number of exclusions is dropping this year. The senior staff who lead and manage the college have a clear understanding of what the college does well and what needs to be improved. They are committed to helping you do as well as you possibly can and to improving what the college has to offer you. We have asked them to do three things to improve the college's work. You can help by always working as hard as you can.

- Give those of you who need additional help with your learning the right kind of support more quickly.
- Help some middle leaders to raise standards and achievement in their subjects to the level of the most successful ones.
- Set you more realistic but challenging targets and monitor your progress rigorously and systematically.

Yours faithfully

Mrs J Greenfield

Lead inspector