

International School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103518
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	331576
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI
Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	911
Sixth form	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Will Wright
Headteacher	Colin Bateman
Date of previous school inspection	30 April to 1 May 2008
School address	Gressel Lane Tile Cross Birmingham B33 9UF
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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 majority of the students are of White British background, with a growing number joining the school from various minority ethnic backgrounds who speak a variety of languages. The number of students learning English as an additional language is below the national average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average. The numbers in the sixth form rose quite significantly in 2008. The school has had specialist status in business and enterprise since 2006. When the school was last inspected a year ago, it was issued with a Notice to Improve because students were not making the progress they should.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has made important improvements over a short period of time. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The headteacher's determination to improve the educational experience for every student is winning the loyal support of students, staff and a growing number of parents. Students commented positively about how much they appreciate the many changes that have been made and that the school is now helping them to be more successful. At the last inspection, a year ago, achievement and standards were judged to be inadequate. Achievement is now satisfactory and standards are broadly average. The intake of the school is beginning to reflect the 'International' name with more students from a range of different cultures and faiths being warmly welcomed by the school. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good.

The headteacher demonstrates well the emphasis the school gives to the care of students through his consistent and patient willingness to consider the needs of every individual. This focus on individuals is backed up by improved monitoring of all aspects of student development. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Students are now experiencing very little inadequate teaching and much more that is good. Learning is less than might be expected in some lessons because the school has yet to convince a minority of students of the importance of achieving their targets. Behaviour is satisfactory and getting better, so that in most year groups learning is rarely affected by poor behaviour. Although the school has had success in increasing attendance, this remains below the average for similar schools and is therefore inadequate. Taken as whole, students' personal development has improved greatly in recent years and is satisfactory. High quality support is now being given to those students not making the progress required to achieve their targets. These crucial improvements, resulting in notably better achievement and attitudes to learning amongst the majority of students, provide the evidence that care, support and guidance are good and illustrate the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

The curriculum has improved and is now satisfactory. There are particular strengths in Years 10 and 11, where students speak highly of the choices they can make. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum does not provide the element of choice pupils would like or sufficient opportunities to develop key skills, particularly in numeracy.

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some notable strengths. All staff are prepared to try out new ideas, even if these are not always totally successful. Challenging targets have been adopted and are having a positive impact on staff and most students. The school has improved its communication with parents, but there is some way to go in persuading a minority of parents to be more involved in student performance reviews. Self-review is satisfactory overall. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses but there are some inaccuracies in judgements because insufficient weight is given to pupils' learning and rates of progress when, for example, leaders monitor lessons. The school's business and

enterprise specialism is improving the skills students need for the next stage of their development, although there are weaknesses in the mathematics specialist subject.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

It is to the school's credit that it has a vision to provide post-16 education to meet the needs of the majority of this community. The curriculum of the sixth form is satisfactory. Supported by the school, the most academically able go elsewhere for a wider range of A-level courses. The increasing number of students gaining five higher grade GCSEs in 2008 contributed to a large increase in students enrolling in the lower sixth. Of those attending the sixth form, about half undertake vocational training at an appropriate level, for instance catering and building skills courses. These courses are well taught and the curriculum meets the needs of these students well. The other half follow an academic curriculum selected from 12 options. Weaknesses in basic skills resulted in a minority of students finding the work too challenging and some did not complete their courses. Results are well below average, although they represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' starting points.

Most of the students attending the sixth form came back to the school because they felt confident with the staff. Relationships between staff and students are friendly and there is satisfactory academic support. Most students receive the guidance they need to move on to appropriate courses or employment. The school has recognised the weakness in the sixth form and is collaborating with other providers to improve the range and quality of courses on offer. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring monitoring and evaluation at all levels is focused on the learning and progress of all groups of students.
- Improve the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 so that it more effectively develops the key skills, particularly numeracy, that students need to succeed in the future.
- Develop effective strategies to further increase parental support for the school, particularly related to attendance and students' achievement of challenging targets.
- Develop a more appropriate curriculum for all sixth formers to improve achievement and the number of students that complete their courses.

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

Improvement is most apparent at GCSE, where the number of students gaining five A* to C qualifications has noticeably increased so the school's results are in line with the national average. These improved results are because of better achievement in a wide range of subjects, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Achievement in the specialist subjects of business studies and information and communication technology is good. The improvement has been less marked in English, science and, particularly, mathematics. Therefore the number of students gaining five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2008 did not increase and remained well below average. This weakness led inspectors to look more closely at these subjects. Progress was found to be better this year, particularly in English, as a result of improved teaching. Since the 2008 results, the school has successfully improved student achievement throughout the school, although Year 8 students are still making slower progress. The achievement of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory and improving as more support is made available to these students in lessons. The school has responded well to meeting the needs of the growing number of students who speak English as an additional language, so they achieve as well as other students. The school consistently ensures nearly every student gains at least one qualification. Literacy levels are improving more quickly than is the case for numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. There are strengths in terms of students' cultural development. In lessons and around the school, boys and girls and different ethnic groups were observed to get on well with each other. Discussions with pupils indicate the vast majority understand what is acceptable behaviour and the consequences of not behaving well because of the school's clear and consistent behaviour policy. Most students like coming to school and exclusion and absence rates are reducing. However, these rates are still too high, indicating that a minority of students do not value and take advantage of the education the school offers. Although very few parents returned questionnaires, of those that did about a third expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour. During the inspection, whilst students were sometimes boisterous around the school and not all were fully engaged in some lessons, no learning was observed to be disrupted by poor behaviour. Students indicate that behaviour is improving in almost every year group.

Students feel safe in the school. They know that bullying will be dealt with but some younger students talk about persistent name-calling. Students are knowledgeable about healthy eating, as discussions about the varied range of options available in the canteen indicated. However, inspectors agree with the school that, whilst satisfactory, there is scope for improvement in students' healthy eating and their participation in exercise. Students' contribution to the community is satisfactory. The school council, elected by students, is developing well and students organise events

to raise money for local charities. Students are beginning to recognise the international nature of their school through its links with schools abroad and the number of students from different cultures who now attend.

The development of students' workplace skills and other skills are satisfactory. The school's specialism in business and enterprise is resulting in students being better prepared for their future working lives. However, literacy and numeracy skills still require improvement if students are to take full advantage of future opportunities available to them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school has made a difference to the quality of teaching in a relatively short time, so that it is now satisfactory. Considerable effort and commitment has gone into developing teachers' confidence and competence through focus weeks on a wide range of issues. The result is that most teaching is now characterised by being thoroughly prepared and planned, with outcomes identified that relate to students' individual targets. A wider range of activities are used to keep students interested, with content that often relates to the real world. For instance, work on metals in science was undertaken in the context of treasure in the sea. Some students do not always respond as positively as might be expected, in part because of a long legacy of previous underachievement. In most lessons, teachers manage behaviour well and this is contributing to improved relationships between staff and students.

In the better lessons, teachers are beginning to show flexibility by adjusting to the mood or atmosphere of the lesson. They have the confidence to drop what has been planned to concentrate on consolidating or developing an important concept. However, in weaker lessons plans are followed too rigidly at the expense of checking students' understanding or allowing time for practising the necessary skills. Sometimes, under pressure of time, reviews of learning are rushed and perfunctory, so that students' learning is not checked or consolidated. Some teachers are encouraging a measure of peer-assessment and review in their lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has several strengths. The school has made a strong commitment to personalised learning and students are benefiting from their wider range of options and the vocational routes on offer. Much is done to help the examination performance of all with booster and master classes. Minority ethnic students can take examinations in their mother tongue. A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme, conducted in tutor time, includes opportunities for work experience and careers guidance. Extra-curricular activities are varied, well-supported and appreciated by the students.

However, the school acknowledges that the curriculum for younger students is 'a work in progress'. Year 9 students are frustrated by being unable to move on to their Year 10 curriculum until September, and their attitudes to learning are less positive as a result. The school is looking at ways of using curriculum time more effectively by, for example, providing a block of time in which the humanities or expressive arts subjects can be taught. The school recognises that numeracy skills need emphasising further in order to raise standards in mathematics. Progress is being made in improving literacy but there is not always a sufficient focus on linking students' individual literacy targets to the reading and writing undertaken in lessons in different subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school has a high commitment to the personal development and well-being of its students, many of whom come from particularly challenging circumstances. Students spoke of how staff are 'prepared to go the extra mile'. Promotion of students' health and safety are good. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are securely in place. Support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective in ensuring they achieve as well as other students. A consistent behaviour policy with clear sanctions that aims to keep students in school is rigorously applied and this is reducing the exclusion rate. The students learning English as an additional language have received effective support enabling them to quickly settle into the school. The school has been successful in reducing the numbers of students who are persistently absent through the greater involvement of parents and through home visits.

Tracking of students' progress is now more rigorous so that teachers are now well informed of their students' needs. Intervention strategies, such as mentoring, support underachieving students. They are having a positive impact on student progress. The work of the new progress leaders is currently focused on students at risk of not gaining higher grade GCSEs. Marking and assessment are now usually at least satisfactory, so that students know what their level or grade is, and know what to do to improve. However, teachers do not check sufficiently that students act upon the advice they receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

There is a strong clear shared vision that is resulting in all staff being prepared to implement new approaches. Staff, parents and students speak positively about the headteacher's role in encouraging individuals to give of their best. This leadership has helped halt the high staff turnover that made the experience for students so inconsistent in recent years. The school is making the most of the 'Teach First' initiative to bring highly promising new teachers into the school. The good support of the local authority is being used well by the school to raise standards. The leadership of care, support and guidance has had a noticeable impact, leading to a reduction in

exclusions and is helping ensure that far more pupils are on track to achieve their targets. There is some variability in the quality of subject leadership in the school.

The adoption of challenging targets, together with more accurate monitoring of student progress has raised the aspirations of teachers and most students. Communication with parents has improved but there is still some way to go in convincing all parents of the importance of being involved in supporting students in the achievement of their targets by encouraging full attendance and participating in review days. The school promotes community cohesion well. The school has ensured it has staff who speak the home languages of the students attending the school. The school council decided to mentor all the pupils learning English as an additional language who have joined the school recently, to make them feel welcome. The school has extensive international links, and with another Birmingham school with a majority of students who are Muslim. A room is made available to act as a place of worship for students of all faiths.

The school has identified the priorities that will result in higher standards and does not duck the issues that need to be addressed. The school has taken great care to gain an accurate insight into aspects of personal development. For instance, it knows the students who do not exercise sufficiently so it is well placed to target intervention to improve their health. However, other aspects of self-evaluation are not as strong. The school does not focus enough on learning and student progress when evaluating its work. This gives leaders an overly positive view of the quality of teaching and learning. Less confident teachers are not always getting the feedback they need to maximise the learning from the promising new approaches. Governors, do not analyse patterns of student performance in sufficient depth. However, governance is satisfactory because governors appropriately challenge the school and provide high levels of expertise that has led to improvement. The financial management of the school has been effective in ensuring that improvement continues overcoming some budget difficulties in the last few years.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

14 June 2009

Dear Students



Inspection of The International School and Community College, Birmingham B33 9UF

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. I would especially like to thank those students who spoke with us for their forthright comments that helped us reach our judgements.

We agree with you that your school is improving. We were particularly impressed that the school has managed to ensure that you are now making better progress with your learning. This allowed us to make the judgement that achievement is satisfactory and that the overall effectiveness of the school is no longer inadequate as it was when the school was inspected a year ago. Important improvements have been made to teaching and care, support and guidance. The latter has improved sufficiently for us to have graded this as good. Many of the people who spoke to us commented on the very good example your headteacher sets by constantly demonstrating the care for every individual student and the greater emphasis on achieving challenging targets. This is changing the atmosphere in school so that many more of you are hungry for success. We were also impressed with the warm welcome you are giving to the increasing numbers of students joining the school from a variety of cultures and faiths. We agreed with the comments you made to us that there are still some lessons that are less stimulating. We think this can be addressed through the following areas we have suggested for improvement.

- Improve teaching and learning by making sure that leaders focus their monitoring on the progress you are making in lessons.
- Make sure that the curriculum helps those of you in Years 7 to 9 to strengthen your basic skills, especially in numeracy.
- Involve your parents more in attending review meetings and supporting the school by ensuring that all students attend whenever they can.
- Develop a more appropriate curriculum and more effective monitoring of progress in the sixth form to improve achievement and the number of students that complete their courses.

You can help by discussing with your parents the progress you are making towards your challenging targets. You can also make a difference by ensuring that you attend regularly and do not miss school unnecessarily.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector