

The Limes College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	102957
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	376787
Inspection dates	30–31 May 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen McShane HMI

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Emma Bradshaw
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen McShane

Her Majesty's Inspector

Debby McCarthy

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. During the inspection, Year 11 students were undertaking statutory examinations and Year 10 students were on a residential experience. Inspectors therefore observed nine lessons in Key Stage 3 with members of the senior management team throughout the two days. They also examined the college's monitoring of teaching, the work of Years 10 and 11 and visited revision sessions. Inspectors met with students from different age groups to gain their views. Only two parental questionnaires were returned. Inspectors therefore attended a family group meeting to speak with more parents and carers and scrutinised the results of a recent school-commissioned questionnaire where returns were higher. Inspectors met with representatives from the local authority and the management committee. They examined documentation related to students' progress, attendance, behaviour and safety.

Information about the school

The Limes College offers a range of educational provision for secondary-aged students who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion. This includes short periods of respite for students who are experiencing difficulties in mainstream school and provision for excluded students with the intention of them returning to a mainstream school or seeking a place in specialist provision. At Key Stage 4, the college offers longer-term provision and offers a range of GCSEs and vocational courses, some in partnership with local colleges, schools or other providers. Since the last inspection, the accommodation has been significantly improved and the college is now on one site.

One fifth of the students have a statement of special educational needs. Most students are White British. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good pupil referral unit. Students make good progress over time at the college. They are very well prepared for the next stage in their education or employment. Most rapidly improve their basic skills in literacy and numeracy, often as a result of targeted and systematic intervention.
- The college is not outstanding because, although teaching over time is good and has many strengths, it is not of consistently high quality all of the time. The progress of students slows in lessons or parts of lessons when there is not enough clarity in the individual learning objectives, when there is slow pace or adults do not have high enough expectations.
- The systematic and yet flexible approach the college adopts to the needs of individuals means that students successfully re-engage with learning and considerably improve their behaviour and feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. A multi-professional approach, including the work of the outreach and special educational needs teams, is key to the college's success. It successfully addresses many of the barriers the students have previously encountered in their learning, relationships or family circumstances.
- The college's individual support and group work means that students have opportunities to discuss and explore issues relevant to their lives. Provision to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is therefore strong.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have considerably improved the provision, accommodation and the curriculum. They have improved the quality of teaching and performance through systematic monitoring and the setting of appropriate areas for improvement. Outcomes have improved. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development of the college. They rightly recognised that the college required a different leadership structure and increased involvement of the management committee to develop accountability for performance, monitoring and evaluation even further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching so more lessons are

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outstanding by:

- using the detailed knowledge of individuals to design and reshape tasks so the level of challenge in learning and for expected behaviour is consistently high
 - ensuring questioning and additional adult support is always focused on the deepening of knowledge or the rapid acquisition of particular skills
 - ensuring the quality of marking, planning and the variety of engaging opportunities provided are as good as in the best practice in the college.
- Build upon the recent changes to the management committee and leadership team by:
- strengthening monitoring and evaluation procedures to bring about further improvements quickly.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The vast majority of students, including those with a statement of special educational needs, achieve well during the time they attend The Limes College. This is a considerable achievement, particularly as many have had negative experiences with schooling, missed significant periods of education and have gaps or difficulties with learning, attitudes and behaviour. Although attainment is low overall and students arrive with different starting points, they leave at the end of Key Stage 4 with a range of qualifications that include GCSEs in subjects such as English, mathematics, science and art or qualifications in hair and beauty, child care, building or motor vehicle maintenance. The number of students achieving higher grades has increased year on year. These qualifications further prepare students for their future lives. They are very well prepared for the next step in their education and/or training and in applying for college courses and employment. Students successfully address previous gaps and difficulties experienced in literacy. They become more confident readers and writers. School data show that they make accelerated progress in English and mathematics, even when their time at the college is only for a short period.

Students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make accelerated progress whilst at the college. Their needs are fully assessed and gaps in their learning are systematically addressed. There are no variations in the achievements of boys and girls, or students from different ethnic backgrounds. Observations of lessons, along with a scrutiny of work in books and coursework, show that students develop a wide range of skills such as problem solving and calculation in mathematics, reading and writing for different purposes, photography and art, as well as a knowledge about hairdressing salons and customer care. Those parents and carers spoken to said they were amazed by the progress their children had made, given their previous experiences at school.

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Quality of teaching

Respectful interaction between staff and students underpins the best lessons seen during the inspection. Expectations of behaviour are strong. Students' opinions are valued and they learn to listen to each other and tolerate different viewpoints. Teachers have good subject knowledge, for example in English, hair and beauty and photography, that they willingly share and challenge students to learn more or to practise new skills. The school's own monitoring, carried out in partnership with the local authority, shows that teaching in the college is typically good with elements that are outstanding. Inspectors worked closely with the senior team and found their judgements on teaching to be accurate, monitoring to be robust and the points for improvement for teachers to be astute. Evidence of good and outstanding teaching is evident in the quality of students' work with imaginative content designed to enthuse individual students, the creative methods used to engage students, and the systematic attention given to the promotion of key skills. There are examples of excellent and encouraging feedback which give students clear pointers for future improvement.

During the inspection, a few lessons were observed where learning was not to this high standard. In these instances, the learning objectives for lessons were too general, did not use assessment information sufficiently well and were not focused sharply enough on the particular needs of individuals. This meant that questioning, additional adult support and the activities provided were not always tailored accurately to meet individual needs. As a result, expectations for learning and behaviour were sometimes not consistently high enough.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

From meetings with students, the rich amount of data and records on individuals available, it is very clear that students make significant improvements over time in managing their own behaviour. Year 11 students in particular, many of whom freely acknowledge past difficulties, are now able to reflect on the personal journey they have made while they have attended The Limes College. They present themselves as engaging young people who demonstrate positive attitudes about their chosen courses and recent educational experiences and are appropriately prepared for the future. The college gives high priority to exploring with the students current and relevant issues such as domestic violence and sexual exploitation, as well as parenthood, sexual health and smoking cessation. This work means that students develop a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Although a small minority remain very difficult to engage, the attendance of most students shows convincing improvement over the time at the college. The college uses a great deal of individual and flexible support to improve attendance and instigates robust action when necessary.

The students report that there is no bullying and that they feel safe and trust adults to 'sort things out' if issue arise. One said that The Limes College was 'like a family that just got on'. Girls and boys get on well together and the college's strong

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curriculum focus on exploring issues of respect means that students have substantial opportunities to explore issues of diversity which allows them to challenge previously held views or stereotypes. Racist incidents are very rare. A few students and a minority of staff in their questionnaires said that behaviour was not well managed. During the inspection, the college was a calm environment with a work-focused atmosphere. However, minor incidents did occur in individual lessons when teaching was not focused enough or expectations were not high enough.

Leadership and management

The strong focus and vision of the headteacher are a key factor in the success of the college. Through her leadership, the college has developed strong partnerships with the local authority and local academies. The work of leaders and the management committee indicate a good capacity to improve. They have a very accurate view of the unit's strengths and areas for development. Since the last inspection, the college has brought about successful improvements to the accommodation, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and there are good plans to develop provision still further. The performance of staff is regularly and accurately reviewed. Continuing professional development of staff has a high priority and is linked to identified areas for improvement. The robust emphasis, shared by senior leaders and the students themselves, on achieving qualifications and developing skills that prepare students for the next step in education and training is very effective and sets high expectations.

Effective case management systems to monitor individual students mean that managers are aware of barriers to progress and, as a consequence, they quickly put in additional provision, for example with reading or speech and language intervention, to address any issues. Managers have rightly identified that in order to improve monitoring and evaluation procedures and accountability further, a new management structure and ways of working for the management committee were required. Some roles and responsibilities were not clear enough and some information was not synthesised sufficiently well. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes.

The curriculum is flexible, personalised and continually developing to best meet the different needs of students. Recent initiatives, either college based, such as hair and beauty, or in partnership with other schools and employers, such as BTEC sports, plastering and building qualifications, mean that more students are able to gain appropriate qualifications in areas that they find interesting. The college, through its outreach team, works very effectively to engage parents and carers, and those whom inspectors met described their high level of satisfaction with the work of the college. Parents and carers talk movingly about their individual journeys so that their children can experience success and that they become more empowered to provide help and support. The college, through its monitoring of individuals and strong curriculum, including the provision for promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, ensures that issues related to equality are addressed well. Safeguarding procedures are robust, given a high priority, and meet requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Limes College, Sutton SM1 2SD

Thank you to all of you who made my colleague and me so welcome when we visited you recently. We were pleased to meet with you, talk about your work and the progress you make while at The Limes College. We found that:

- The Limes College is a good pupil referral unit
- the strong focus on your future qualifications and your next placement is key to the good progress you make
- targeted work helps you make good progress in literacy and numeracy
- most of you considerably improve your behaviour while at The Limes and this helps you to be successful when you move on
- individual support and group work are very effective in letting you explore some difficult issues and helps prepare you for life as an adult
- teaching is good, it captures your interest, and you learn successfully
- you have good opportunities to follow courses that interest you or which give you the qualifications that you need to go to another college
- for a majority of students, attendance improves significantly
- you say you feel safe and learn to trust adults to sort things out for you
- your parents and carers are very satisfied with the work of the unit.

To improve the unit even more, we have asked staff to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best and that recent changes in the unit's management are used to develop the college even more.

You can help the unit by always trying your best, continuing to improve your behaviour and by making sure you attend every day.

I wish you every success in the future.

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector

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