



da Vinci Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134724
Local Authority City of Derby
Inspection number 300417
Inspection dates 6–7 March 2007
Reporting inspector Jane Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	St Andrews View
School category	Community		Breadsall
Age range of pupils	11–16		Derby DE21 4ET
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01332 831515
Number on roll (school)	574	Fax number	01332 830106
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr E Hindmarsh
		Headteacher	Mr R Martlew
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	6–7 March 2007	300417

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

da Vinci Community College is smaller than average. It serves an area of Derby that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Nearly 40 per cent of the students are eligible for free school meals, which is very high. A rising proportion of students, currently around 10 per cent, are of minority ethnic heritage or have home languages other than English; some are at the early stages of learning the language. Students' attainment on entry is well below average. About a third of the students have learning difficulties and disabilities. There are more girls than boys, particularly in Year 7. The college's roll is rising; more students than is typical join the college at times other than at the start of Year 7. The college moved into new accommodation in September 2006. Strong links have been forged with other local schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

da Vinci Community College provides a satisfactory education for its students. Standards are low but rising. In relation to their low starting points, students are achieving satisfactorily. The principal's leadership is outstanding; its impact is clearly evident in the college's transformation over the last three years. His understated style brings out the best in staff and students, who feel valued and empowered to contribute fully and happily to the life of the college. The college is inclusive; it places the development of the whole young person at the heart of all that it strives to do. The principal's vision for the college's future is widely shared and has ensured a strong focus on raising standards. His relentless drive brings out the best in staff and students. Consequently everyone feels valued and a positive ethos for learning has successfully been created. A distinctive feature is the exceptional way the college works with a wide range of partners to the benefit of all students' well-being and life chances, especially for those who are vulnerable.

Leadership and management at other levels are good overall. The principal is ably supported by his team of senior colleagues and increasingly effective middle-level leaders and governing body. Strategic leadership is good. Robust management systems and structures generate evidence which informs improvement planning well. The capacity for further improvement is good. The college operates smoothly on a day-to-day basis. All are enjoying the exciting new building and speak of the uplifting effect it has had on learning and teaching. Resources are generally well deployed. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Given students' starting points, achievement is satisfactory. Standards are low but rising across the college, notably in Key Stage 4 where GCSE results leapt up in 2005 and improved again in 2006. Students who have learning difficulties and disabilities achieve as well as their peers, the statistic that best captures the college's inclusive ethos and rising standards is the proportion of students awarded five or more A* to G grades: at 96 per cent, this is as good as any other school working in similar circumstances. At both key stages though, there is scope to raise standards further, particularly through challenging the more able students to fulfil their potential. Weaknesses in students' literacy skills remain an impediment to their progress.

The college has focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning; it is almost always at least satisfactory and about a half is good or, occasionally, outstanding. More remains to be done to ensure that teaching is appropriately challenging and takes the development of students' literacy skills sufficiently into account. The curriculum is good. It is increasingly responsive to students' needs and designed to raise aspirations, although some elements are in the relatively early stages. Individually tailored academic guidance is supplemented by effective pastoral care.

Students are right to be proud of the college and the part they enjoy playing in its work and within the wider community. Behaviour is good and attendance has improved. Good relationships between students and with staff are underpinned by a nurturing ethos that results in students feeling safe and growing in self-confidence. The college

works hard and successfully to ensure those who arrive part-way through their secondary schooling are helped to settle into da Vinci ways and given effective support to meet their additional educational needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise standards, paying particular attention to the achievement of the more able students.
- Improve students' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, to help them become independent learners.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding, capitalising on best practice in the college.
- Work innovatively with the local authority to support students who join mid-year in meeting the college's high expectations, particularly in relation to attendance and behaviour.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. In Key Stage 4, students have achieved well to make up ground lost in their early years of secondary education. Standards are low but improving. At GCSE in 2006, 25 per cent gained five or more A* to C grades, 96 per cent achieved at least five A* to G grades, and almost all gained at least one qualification. While rightly celebrating what has been achieved so far, the college is not complacent. It knows, for example, that boys achieved less well than girls and that there was significant variation in the performance of different subjects particularly at the higher grades.

Standards are also rising at Key Stage 3. Results of national tests in English, mathematics and science in 2005 showed substantial improvement when compared with High View School's 2004 results. Around half of the students reached at least Level 5, which is the standard expected at age 14 years. 2006 saw further rises, particularly at the higher Level 6. Mathematics retains its lead as the strongest performing core subject, exceeding its targets despite the significant number of students who joined part-way through Year 9. Overall, the results represent broadly satisfactory progress when students' Key Stage 2 results are taken into account. Nevertheless, there is potential to improve students' rates of progress over time.

Standards in literacy remain low and impede students' progress. The college is implementing various strategies to tackle this, but some are further advanced than others. In addition to ensuring that weaknesses in literacy do not act as barriers to learning, the college might profitably review how subjects could contribute to improving students' reading and writing skills. Students' skills in speaking and listening are improving, in part as a consequence of the college's work on developing teachers' questioning skills, but also due to students' better attitudes to learning and gains in their self-confidence. Nevertheless, more attention could be paid to extending students' responses.

Effective systems ensure that teachers assess students' performance accurately and track their progress. The college's predictions of performance are largely accurate, especially when the influx of students is taken into account. Many of these students have additional educational needs or are in the early stages of learning to speak English. Senior leaders are aware of the challenges but the implementation of a range of practical strategies, coupled with a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, mean that the college is well placed to drive standards higher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. The college's positive and purposeful ethos underpins all aspects of students' learning and personal development. Most students meet the college's high expectations of them; the vast majority behave well in lessons, and are considerate and courteous around the college. Students who have behavioural problems are well supported, sometimes being removed temporarily from classes to avoid disrupting the learning of others. Exclusions have reduced dramatically over the last two years. Students feel safe, confident that the college will listen to their concerns, and treat one another with respect. Rare cases of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Attendance has greatly improved and is now satisfactory overall although the failure of a minority of older students to attend regularly adversely affects the attendance figures for this age group. Students' spiritual development is well catered for through the programme of personal, health, social, and citizenship education (PHSCE) and in tutor time and assemblies, but less so in other subjects. Students show concern for others by their commitment to raising money for local and international charities. Their social and cultural development is enriched by a wide range of trips and visits. The college is steadily expanding opportunities to prepare students for life in an increasingly multi-cultural society. As a result of extensive contact with local businesses, together with work experience and a curriculum that is adapted to meet their needs, students are well prepared for their economic future, although low skills in literacy and numeracy remain a barrier for many students. The student council is an active body which is proud of its consultative role in developing the life of the college and promoting its interests in the wider community. Students are health conscious; they speak enthusiastically about the quality and variety of food offered in the canteen. Many participate in one or more of the wide diversity of sports activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The college places teaching and learning at the core of its development. Its records show steady improvements across the college. Inspection evidence accords well with the college's view, both in the overall quality and in the detail of strengths and areas

for development. As well as helping teachers improve their practice, the college has developed students' understanding of what constitutes good learning.

Common strengths in the teaching include a consistent approach to lesson planning; lessons begin with a starter activity and end with a session where teachers check what students have learned. Good use is made of the teaching assistants. In the best lessons, teachers plan sequences of activities to meet the varying needs and abilities of those in the class. Although teachers regularly identify key vocabulary, they do not often modify materials to take account of students' difficulties in reading and writing, or consider explicitly ways these skills might be developed within the context of that subject. Most teachers use questioning effectively to check students' understanding; some are skilful in rephrasing and asking follow-up questions. More emphasis could be given to encouraging students to extend their thinking and spoken responses. In one lesson, students asked searching questions when quizzing a teacher acting in the role of a slum-dweller.

Relationships are good. Students are willing to work and want to do well. They cooperate when working in groups or pairs. Lessons generally proceed at a brisk pace with students engaged in a range of activities. Sometimes this desire to work quickly does not allow students to complete work in enough depth. There are also too few opportunities for independent learning.

The college has worked hard to promote good use of assessment. Teachers regularly refer to what students are required to do to achieve a particular grade or level. Students are involved in the assessment of their own and others' work, and most know their targets and the standard at which they are working. The college has identified inconsistencies in the quality of marking, particularly in the provision of guidance on how to improve, and in homework. The lack of a homework timetable does not allow students to develop organisational skills in managing their time and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good; it is broad, balanced and adapted to the needs of individual students. It contributes effectively to the college's central purpose of developing the whole student. The youngest students follow a curriculum that emphasises their social and emotional development through the effective PSHCE programme and promotes their progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. All students study information and communication technology (ICT), which improves their skills and helps prepare them for the future. Provision for students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory and improving. Students' additional needs are carefully identified and a range of strategies used to support them; these are monitored to gauge their effectiveness. The separate provision for the few disaffected students is not consistently linked closely to the mainstream curriculum to aid re-integration.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum is developing well with some innovative practice, and includes partnership with other providers. Alongside traditional subjects, the college offers an increasing range of vocational options and types of qualification. This diversity

of choice has had a positive impact on students' interest and is helping to raise their aspirations and self-esteem. Coupled with clearly focused academic guidance, the college has succeeded in encouraging students to consider the possibilities of employment, college and university, aided by good links with local colleges and businesses. Almost all the Year 11 leavers in 2006 progressed to further education, employment or training. The college is well placed to capitalise on current national curricular developments.

Students are enthusiastic about the wide choice of extra-curricular activities and off-site experiences, such as trips abroad and various cultural events. The college's new facilities have enabled students to enjoy a range of sporting and leisure activities. A young enterprise scheme has involved students setting up their own company and learning about marketing. After-school activities include classes for students who are taking extra GCSE courses in science and modern languages; reflecting students' raised aspirations. There are also study and revision clubs in holiday times.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Provision for students' care, guidance and support is good. Exceptionally good links with primary schools ensure that students transfer smoothly into Year 7. Thereafter, their progress is carefully tracked and targets set, resulting in improving attainment for students of all abilities. Year 9 students are carefully guided towards appropriate Key Stage 4 courses. In Year 11, students have personal mentors to advise and direct their learning, helping them undertake preparation for GCSE examinations and the next stage of their education. Effective links with agencies such as Derby University and the Aim Higher initiative support more able students. Students are developing confidence, independence and increasingly high aspirations.

Responses to the parental questionnaires are very positive about the college's work. Procedures for child protection and health and safety are followed systematically. The college makes very good use of various agencies to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities and successfully meets the challenge presented by increasing numbers of students who arrive from other countries with little or no ability to speak English. All have personalised learning plans and are supported by teaching assistants.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A crucial feature of the principal's outstanding leadership, which has rubbed off influentially on others, is his ability to understand the interrelationships between the different aspects of the college's work and how they contribute to students' personal development and fulfilment of potential. For example, he knows that making the curriculum more interesting and relevant can raise standards, increase students' enjoyment of school, improve their behaviour and equip them better for the future. He is also aware that this cannot happen without developing teachers' knowledge and skills, selecting suitable methods of assessment, and ensuring that students receive

appropriate advice and guidance at each stage of their education. This integrated approach has underpinned developments so far, and has set the college firmly on its ambitious journey. The college knows where it is going and how to get there.

The principal benefits from good support from his senior colleagues. He capitalises on their individual strengths; collectively, they make an effective team. Middle-level leaders similarly vary in their experience and influence, but are increasingly effective and understand the clear expectations of their role. The process of 'area review' is used well to promote improvement systematically, enhanced by good informal professional dialogue between managers. Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning good; key priorities and appropriate actions are identified and there are relevant arrangements to gauge their impact. Line-management arrangements ensure staff are held accountable while providing the mechanism for challenge, support and development. Continuing professional development is carefully thought through and responsive to the needs of individuals and the whole college. Staff are willing to explore new ideas, learn from each other, and respond positively to constructive feedback.

The governing body was newly constituted in September 2005 and is developing its role well. It has appropriate committee structures and fulfils its statutory responsibilities. Governors are increasingly involved in strategic planning. They receive good quality information from the principal and they ask some searching questions. The college is well resourced, for instance with interactive whiteboards and computers although resources to display students' work are insufficient. Support from the local authority has been used effectively and tailored to the college's identified priorities.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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 the 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?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 March 2007

Dear Students

da Vinci Community College, St Andrew's View, Breadsall, Derby, DE21 4ET

I am writing to tell you about the findings of our inspection but, first of all, I would like to thank you for giving us such a friendly welcome. We enjoyed hearing your views and experiences of college, visiting your lessons, and seeing your work.

You may know that I have visited da Vinci twice previously to check how well it was doing as a newly opened college. I have been impressed with how much it has changed, and how everyone has pulled together to make this happen. You are all to be congratulated!

Here are some of the things we liked best about da Vinci.

- Exam results are getting better at Key Stages 3 and 4. Last summer almost all Year 11 students passed at least five GCSEs. The teachers tell us that next summer's results should be even better if you carry on working hard.
- Your behaviour is good. You get on well with each other and with staff. You take responsibility seriously, and show you care for others through your fundraising for charities.
- You know about healthy living. You eat healthily in college and keep fit by playing many sports, such as badminton and trampolining. The college's new sports facilities are really exciting. You told us what a difference the new building has made to lessons too.
- The college is working hard to give you interesting and useful subjects to learn.
- The headteacher, helped by the staff and governors, is excellent at leading the college. He is very proud of you!

We have asked Mr Martlew, the staff and governors, to do the following things to improve da Vinci further.

- Help you gain even better results in national tests and examinations.
- Make sure that you become good at reading and writing, speaking and listening, to help you learn things for yourself.
- Continue to improve lessons so that they challenge you to think just the right amount.
- Help new students settle into da Vinci ways quickly.

I am sure you will continue to play your part in helping da Vinci go from strength to strength. Perhaps you might discuss your ideas through the student council?

I hope to hear about your successes in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones HMI