

The International School and Community College, East Birmingham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103518
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308345
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

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	846
6th form	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Will Wright
Headteacher	Colin Bateman
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Gressel Lane Tile Cross Birmingham B33 9UF
Telephone number	0121 4649600
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The International School and Community College, East Birmingham was formed in September 2002 when two secondary schools amalgamated. The number on roll has been on the decline over the last three years; however, this trend is now beginning to reverse. The majority of the students are of White British background, with a growing number joining the school from various minority ethnic backgrounds who speak over 40 different languages. However, the number of students learning English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school was awarded specialist status in Business Enterprise in June 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is, therefore, given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards and achievement in the core subjects of English and mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 3.

The school's overall effectiveness is inadequate because, in Years 7 to 9, achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are exceptionally low. Students enter the school with standards that are well below average for their age and make inadequate progress by the end of Year 9. Recent strategies, implemented to improve students' progress in Years 10 and 11, have begun to help raise achievement. In the 2007 examinations, a high proportion of students met their targets, although too few students attained five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Difficulties in staffing, teacher recruitment and recent changes in leadership have led to inconsistencies in teaching and variable rates of progress by the students.

Teaching is steadily improving and is satisfactory. Relationships with students are mostly good. In some good lessons, there is very effective use of questioning techniques and a stimulating range of activities. However, teaching is too often uninspiring, involving a limited range of teaching strategies and lacks pace to challenge students. Marking is inconsistent and too much does not provide guidance on what students could do, and need to do to further improve their work. In addition, targets set are not always sufficiently challenging.

The school rightly takes pride in its inclusive ethos. The inclusion unit plays a significant role in ensuring that the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met. Students are well looked after and are nurtured in small groups. The care, guidance and support provided ensure that students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students feel safe. As one student said, 'I feel safe now and I am not afraid to come to school', while another said, 'I really look forward to coming to school now.' Students are mostly well behaved and have good attitudes to learning in the majority of lessons that engage their interest. Despite the efforts made by the school, attendance remains stubbornly below the national average in Key Stage 3 and 4 but is satisfactory in the sixth form.

The curriculum does not offer religious and physical education to its students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Consequently, the school currently does not meet its statutory requirements. A significant majority of students in Years 10 and 11 choose to follow vocational courses that are extended into the sixth form. There are good procedures for supporting all students in the transition to further study and employment. Guidance on the next steps in their careers and good links with the local businesses through the school's specialist status in business and enterprise help to widen their opportunities for education and employment. However, their low levels of literacy and numeracy skills do not always adequately prepare them for the world of work. The school has used its status as a specialist in business and enterprise, including its new facilities to widen the curriculum and cultivate links with the community. The students speak highly of the extra-curricular activities, which have good rates of participation.

Leadership and management, including governance are satisfactory. A newly established, highly committed senior leadership team supports the headteacher and shares his vision. Senior leaders know the school well and have a clear overview of what needs to be done to improve the school further. However, middle leaders do not have a consistent and rigorous approach to checking

their own work or that of students. This is evident in subject self-evaluations, where there is not enough emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards. Students in Years 10 and 11, as well as those in Years 12 and 13, were able to cite the considerable difference that the current headteacher has made to the school. For example, the students maintain that behaviour has improved considerably in the last two years. Members of the student council speak enthusiastically about some of the changes. The school has implemented a number of strategies to raise achievement but these are relatively new and have not had sufficient time to impact on the legacy of underachievement and overall standards. However, there are early indications of some success and, as a result the school's capacity to improve is good. Value for money is inadequate. Parents are generally happy with what the school provides but a significant minority feel that the communication between them and the school could be improved.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards on entry are below average. Overall standards remain below average but students' achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students speak highly of the support and value the guidance they receive in making future academic choices, both at the end of Key Stage 4 and throughout their time in the sixth form. They feel they receive good feedback on their learning. The school strives to meet the needs of all its students through offering a range of vocational courses, which are appropriate to prepare them for life at work. Students' work is regularly assessed and closely monitored through the sixth form steering group to help them improve. There is currently limited provision for academic courses, and consequently a number of students leave to attend other colleges at the end of Year 11. The school has acted on this by re-introducing a much broader curriculum from September 2008 and early enrolment figures are encouraging. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory and is strengthened by an effective tutor programme.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in the core subjects of English and mathematics, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Broaden the range of teaching and learning styles used so that students are more actively involved in their learning, and ensure that targets are sufficiently challenging.
- Develop the role of middle leaders so that they are more effective in raising standards and more rigorous in their monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensure that the curriculum meets all statutory requirements.
- Improve relationships and communications with parents and carers so that they feel more fully involved in their children's education.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

By the end of Year 9, standards are well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. By the end of Year 11, the percentage of students gaining five higher grade passes at GCSE has improved recently but standards remain below average. However, when English and mathematics are included in the statistics, results indicate that standards are exceptionally

low. Progress by the end of Year 9 has been inadequate during the past three years. Recent emphasis on improving performance at Key Stage 3 by focusing on literacy and numeracy is beginning to have some impact on overall performance. This is evident in design and technology, mathematics and science, and particularly with those students who are more able. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. Girls do better than boys. Close monitoring of students' progress towards their targets has led to focused intervention aimed at underachievers, particularly boys. The additional time and effort allocated to the teaching of mathematics and English to students working on the grade C/D borderline is paying dividends. Students, who have a statement of special educational need, and those with English as an additional language, make better progress than other students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is because those with statements of special educational need are supported well in small groups by specialist staff, as are those for whom English is an additional language. Support within classes for other students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is less effective.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. A good range of cultures is celebrated through assemblies and the excellent displays around the school. Links with Turkey and China encourage students to appreciate and value the needs of others. Behaviour overall has improved in lessons and is satisfactory. Although behaviour is often good in social areas, it is sometimes boisterous in corridors and in the playground. Nevertheless, relationships are good and students are generally supportive of one another. Students say that bullying is not a regular occurrence and that they know who to turn to for support. Exclusion rates have declined significantly in the last two years. Students generally adopt healthy lifestyles but not everyone chooses the healthy options during lunch. The school council provides an appropriate opportunity for students to express their views and it has been instrumental in making some improvements to the social areas for students. Students participate in the local community through, for example, helping to raise money and visiting the elderly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

While teaching is satisfactory overall, there is not enough good teaching to overcome the legacy of underachievement, particularly at Key Stage 3. There are signs that teaching and learning are improving. For the first time in four years, the school has a full complement of specialist staff. Most of them establish good relations with students and manage behaviour well. As a result, students are generally keen to learn. In the best planned lessons, teachers take into account students' prior learning. With the aid of information communication technology (ICT), they spell out clearly what students must, should and could do. However, these expectations are not always reinforced for the less able students and not all of them achieve as well as they could. There are still some lessons where there are inconsistencies in practice. For example, some teachers do not always plan activities with sufficient challenge, lessons lack pace and the

range of teaching and learning styles is too narrow. The school recognises the need to ensure more consistency and rigour in its approach to assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

The school has adopted an innovative approach to the curriculum in order to ensure that the needs and aspirations of its students are well catered for in Years 10 and 11. The school's commitment to providing more appropriate vocational courses for older students and a range of extra-curricular activities has improved the motivation and enjoyment of most of its students. These include, for example, health and beauty, catering, construction and business enterprise. There is a clear focus on developing students' skills in ICT, but opportunities to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills are limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall, the quality of care, guidance and support for students is satisfactory. Child protection and health and safety procedures are secure and all adults are aware of their responsibilities. The pastoral system effectively identifies individual needs. There is appropriate and well-coordinated support for students involving external agencies. Procedures to monitor how well students are progressing and identify potential underachievement have improved, but they are not yet used consistently by all staff. The care, guidance and support for students with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. They make slightly better progress than the rest of the students however, there is still significant underachievement amongst this group. Careers advice, guidance and effective links with Connexions Service ensure that students receive appropriate advice about the choices they make at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some strengths. The headteacher's dedication and hard work have provided strong and purposeful leadership through a period of significant change. His vision and approach to school improvement underline the principle that 'every child deserves the best and that every child matters'. He has empowered staff and has injected vitality into leadership and management at all levels. The senior team have demonstrated the capacity to take on leadership roles which are becoming more tightly focused on students' progress. Together, they have created a secure learning environment. Since 2007, rigorous measures have been put into place to tackle key priorities with some success. For example, behaviour has improved significantly in the last two years, although staff recognise that they now need to empower students to take greater responsibility for their own behaviour. This and other work in and around the school, particularly the work through Business and Enterprise, have had some impact on higher grade GCSE pass rates. The newly formed governing body is

very clear about the direction it needs to take to ensure future improvements. It has taken decisive action to ensure individual strengths are used more effectively. Governors challenge the school over aspects of its performance, particularly achievement and standards.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	3
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	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Annex A

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	3	
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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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?	Yes	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students

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

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome during our recent visit to your school. We very much appreciated you taking the time to speak with us about the recent changes in your school, your work and the improvements to the school that you have been involved in during the last few years. You told us, and we agree, that the headteacher and his senior leaders have significantly improved the school in the last two years. You particularly cited the improvement in behaviour in the classrooms and that you now feel safe and enjoy coming to school. You say that you enjoy lessons when you are asked lots of challenging questions and there is a range of interesting activities. You make a good contribution to the community, participating in a range of charity work and in supporting the elderly. In the sixth form, you have a wide choice of courses, which are jointly provided with local schools and local colleges. However, you cited that there are not enough academic courses to choose from, which the school is doing something about from September 2008.

While the sixth form is satisfactory, the main school is not providing you with an adequate education. We have agreed with the headteacher, senior leaders and governors that there are a number of important things to concentrate on to improve your experience at school and help you to do well. These include:

- Improving your performance in English and mathematics, particularly in Years 7 to 9, by broadening the range of teaching and learning styles used so that you are more actively involved.
- Setting sufficiently ambitious targets for you.
- Middle leaders needing to take a bigger role in helping you to do better through monitoring yours and their own work more rigorously.
- Improving relationships and communications with parents and carers so that they feel more fully involved in your education.
- Making sure that the curriculum fully meets requirements, by providing physical education and religious education at Key Stage 4 and in the 6th form.

Inspectors will visit again during the next year to see how the school is getting on with its work. You have an important part to play by coming to school regularly, working hard and continuing to behave well so that you can all make good progress in lessons.

Best wishes for the future.

Rashida Sharif Her Majesty's Inspector