

Meadowbrook College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133776
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	381562
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Pupil Referral Unit
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katherine Ryan
Headteacher	Andrew Creese
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 February 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Melvyn Blackband

Additional Inspector

Lily Evans

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 13 lessons and 13 teachers. In total five hours was spent observing teaching across the college's four sites. Meetings were held with students, staff and the Chair of the Management Committee. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the college's work, and looked at college documentation on the curriculum, the performance of students and of teachers. They scrutinised safeguarding policies and procedures and records of the students' behaviour along with care plans. The college development planning and review of its own strengths and weaknesses were also scrutinised. Inspectors took into account the views of parents and carers in 10 returned questionnaires, 21 student questionnaires and 19 staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

Meadowbrook College is a pupil referral unit which provides for students who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools or who are at risk of exclusion, mainly because of behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The range of support includes a short-term intervention programme for a minority of students in Key Stages 3 and 4, including reintegration support back into mainstream education and a full-time individualised alternative curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 who form the great majority of students at the college. A higher than average proportion of students has a statement of special educational needs, primarily for emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Vocational courses are offered to mainstream and other students from local special schools as well as to those from the college. The work of the college, managed centrally from The Harlow Centre, is spread across four sites, the most distant being 25 miles away. The college serves students from across the county and the vast majority are White British. A much higher than average proportion of the students is known to be eligible for free school meals. Boys outnumber girls in all year groups.

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 which has shown consistent improvement in all aspects of its work since the previous inspection. The majority of students make good progress and a growing minority make better progress. They also manage their own behaviour increasingly well and quickly improve in a range of personal skills. The college is not outstanding because students do not make consistently outstanding gains in their learning over time.
- Teaching is good across all college sites. Teachers plan effectively and teach with enthusiasm and skill and students enjoy their lessons and respond well. In the most successful lessons, each gain in learning is recorded and the pace of activities adapted for each student's specific needs. However, on a few occasions, teachers do not always do this successfully and the students' learning is not as focused as it could be. The curriculum is well designed to give students every opportunity to develop academic and vocational skills as well as engaging them in a wide range of creative and sporting activities.
- Students' behaviour is good. The college is calm and students feel safe. Their attendance is average overall but there are a few students with high rates of absence. Nevertheless, the large majority have made very substantial improvements in their attendance since entering the college.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is relentless in his drive for continual improvement, ably assisted by his leadership team and an active and well-informed management committee. Since the previous inspection, the responsibilities of middle leaders have been extended and they are now more effective in carrying out their responsibilities. The performance of teachers has been closely monitored and supported by good professional development. This has had a very positive impact on rising levels of achievement, together with markedly improving behaviour, attendance and personal skills.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve achievement by ensuring that all teachers:
 - always record each step in students' learning
 - set sharply focused learning targets which help the students understand how to improve their work.
- Raise attendance rates further, over the next year, particularly of those students with high levels of absence.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement is good because teaching and the curriculum are effective in helping students to learn well. Parents and carers confirm this view. Almost all students, especially those in Key Stage 4, enter the provision with relatively low levels of attainment compared to mainstream students. By the end of Year 11, a large minority of students has successfully narrowed the gap in attainment against national expectations. For example, in 2011, the majority of students acquired five GCSE passes at A* to G grades, including English and mathematics, albeit at the lower grades. Students also achieve success in vocational BTEC qualifications; a steadily growing proportion has progressed from Foundation to Level 1 passes. Almost all students reach the challenging individual targets set for them by the college and since the previous inspection, a growing proportion, year on year, exceeds them. A high proportion of the small number of Year 9 students reintegrates successfully back into mainstream schools and resumes their education there. This is because the college has successfully got them back on track by improving their attitudes to learning, behaviour, attendance and motivation to learn which all help them become better learners. The college assessment procedures quickly identify students with specific difficulties in reading or writing and intensive individual support in literacy is effective in improving students' basic skills and confidence in reading and writing. Literacy skills are practised and developed in each learning activity and have provided a strong foundation for students' success. As a result, all students, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, make equally good progress. This includes both boys and girls.

Progress is accelerating at a rapid rate because the students enjoy their work and are motivated to improve further. This was seen in an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson for Year 11 students at the Bridge Centre where they were working at a music activity on computers. The activities were skilfully matched to individuals' capabilities and specific learning needs. Students responded with intense concentration and effort, and pride because they had met

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the high expectations of their teacher. They made excellent progress, not least in their literacy skills, as they wrote concise but detailed accounts of their work in coursework folders. The students report that they find work at the college interesting and that they enjoy doing well in their studies.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good. Parents, carers and students think that teaching is effective and the curriculum meets individuals' learning needs well. Teaching has shown steady improvement since the previous inspection as a result of rigorous monitoring and high levels of effective support to improve teachers' subject knowledge and expertise, teaching skills and methods. Teachers plan their lessons well and in the best lessons adapt learning activities successfully to take account of every student's ability and interests, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. This said, there are a few occasions when teachers do not record students' progress in each lesson effectively enough. This can lead to less sharply defined learning targets for the next lesson and there are times when students are not given clear enough information about the small incremental steps that must be made to improve their work and accelerate their progress further. Nevertheless, teachers have overwhelmingly high expectations as to what students can achieve and give a high level of individual support and encouragement where necessary. Staff are very successful in boosting students' self-confidence and self-worth, important pre-requisites for learning. Lessons are well paced and interesting and this means students of all abilities enjoy and feel confident in trying to learn new things; their motivation improves and their progress quickly accelerates. Because of these effective strategies, teaching supports the pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development well.

Teachers ensure that the students practise their literacy skills in every lesson and they promote the students' oral skills successfully by the well-chosen questions that they ask and through the detailed responses that they get. The emphasis on using literacy across the curriculum is actively pursued by all staff. This was seen to good effect in a work-related skills lesson in Year 10 at the main centre. The lesson was well planned for each student as a result of thorough assessment of their progress in preceding lessons. The stimulating DVD of interview techniques was accompanied by lively and perceptive questioning by the teacher. This motivated and interested the students who responded well. At the end of the lesson, they could clearly explain what they had learned and how it would benefit them in life beyond school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is typically good and is much improved from the time of entry to the college and since the last inspection. Most parents, carers and students think behaviour is good. However, a small proportion of parents and carers felt that behaviour caused them concern but this was not borne out by inspection evidence. The sites are quiet and calm places where the students report that they feel secure and safe. This is confirmed by parents, carers and the students themselves. There

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are good relationships. Students are supportive of each other and behave well and take increasing responsibility for their own learning, acting responsively and maturely in the small sociable groups. Students show a good awareness of the different forms of bullying, including name-calling and cyber-bullying, and of the effect racist and homophobic comments can have on others. Bullying is rare and students say when incidents occur they are very quickly dealt with by staff. Fixed-term exclusions are now unusual because the college's clear and detailed system of restorative procedures is well understood and followed by students. The students learn in a variety of situations such as in circle time and in personal, health and social education lessons how their actions impact on others. Each site is a cohesive community. When occasionally a student exhibits challenging behaviour, this is dealt with sympathetically and great pains are taken to explain the consequence of actions to the student to bring about improvement. Students are almost always courteous, considerate and respectful to staff and other students and meet the college's high expectations of their behaviour. This has a very positive impact on their learning since students feel safe and lessons are rarely disrupted. The students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe through well-organised tuition about the dangers of drugs and street violence.

The college makes strenuous, determined and successful efforts to combat the students' absence and the great majority of students have substantially increased their attendance from low levels before they entered the college. Some students have attended on every day over the year. However, some students do not attend regularly enough despite leaders' best efforts to get them into college.

Leadership and management

Through his experience and determination, the headteacher has ensured that standards of provision and students' performance have risen consistently since the previous inspection. He has been well supported by his senior team and by his middle managers who have developed into key figures in monitoring and improving standards across all college sites. Members of the management committee are knowledgeable about the college's strengths and weaknesses and provide effective challenge and support in the college's drive for further improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are carefully monitored by the management committee. Recruitment and staff vetting procedures are robust. The college ensures that students have an equally good chance to do well and that there is no discrimination between different groups of learners.

There has been significant improvement in the recording and tracking of students' progress in both academic and personal areas of their development and in ensuring that the curriculum is well adapted to the needs of individuals. Effective work has been done to ensure gaps in students' learning are rectified and that the college's performance is improving when compared to national standards. The performance of teachers is regularly and carefully monitored and tailored support provided. These features demonstrate that there is clear capacity for the college to improve further.

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The curriculum is good because it is broad and balanced and designed to allow every student, at his or her own level, to develop academic, vocational, creative and personal skills which fit them well for the next stage of their education. The students take part in many trips and visits which help to broaden their cultural experience. This increases their awareness of cultural diversity in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted.

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.

14 May 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Meadowbrook College, Oxford OX3 0PG

Thank you for making my colleague and I welcome when we inspected your college recently. We were pleased to see how friendly and cooperative you were to each other and to the staff. It was good to see that you are making good progress and that, in most cases, your behaviour and attendance have improved significantly since you joined the college. You told us that you enjoy being at the college and this was borne out in your returned questionnaires and in what you said during the inspection. There were a number of things we felt it was important to tell you.

- You are almost all making good progress and a growing number are achieving very well and catching up with students who have remained in mainstream schools.
- Your behaviour is good and much improved along with your understanding of how your behaviour affects others. You are developing a mature understanding of respect and thought for others along with a clear moral sense and good social skills.
- The curriculum is well suited to your individual needs and is flexible enough to allow each of you to pursue the things you are interested in most. As a result, most of you leave to go to college or further training.
- Your teachers are well prepared and teach you well. Occasionally, they do not always write down each stage of progress you make and we want them to do this so you are always clear on how to make your work better.
- Your attendance has improved since you came to the college. Some of you attend every day. Well done! There is still room for improvement for some who do not come to college regularly enough despite leaders' best efforts. We want your teachers to try even harder to encourage you all into college more regularly. As you know, it is very hard to make good progress if you are not coming to college.

You can all have a positive effect on your education by behaving well and attending regularly.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn Blackband
Lead inspector

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