

Leon School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110502
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	310336
Inspection dates	6-7 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Fletcher (HMI)

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

Type of School	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	765
Sixth form	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jessica Madge
Headteacher	Mr Simon Viccars
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2007
School address	Fern Grove Bletchley Milton Keynes MK2 3HQ
Telephone number	01908 624720
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Leon School and Sports College is a smaller than average comprehensive school on the southern edge of Milton Keynes. The school serves an area of high economic deprivation, with around one third of students being entitled to free school meals. There is a high level of mobility within the local community. Attainment on entry to the school is much lower than average. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is lower. Around one fifth of the student population are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the majority of these from a Bangladeshi background. The proportion of students who do not have English as their first language is higher than average. The school has been a specialist sports college since 1997, and has held the Investor in People award since 1999. It also holds the Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold awards. Building work is taking place on site to construct a community learning resource centre comprising a theatre/cinema and an internet café.

The school was last inspected in January 2007, and given a notice to improve. Areas for improvement identified were: raising standards in English, mathematics and science; improving the quality and consistency of learning and teaching and of the assessment of students' work; and fully implementing a tracking system to ensure that the progress of students is properly monitored.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Leon School has improved significantly in the last year and now provides a satisfactory education, good care and support, and an outstanding curriculum. The head teacher's vision for the future is shared and supported by all staff, and builds on the improvements identified at the time of the last inspection. Senior leaders provide a strong strategic direction to improve the quality of education in the school, and many new initiatives have recently been implemented. Middle leaders are focused on raising expectations and performance, although there is still some inconsistency in the rigour of their self-evaluation processes. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have a good capacity for further improvement, which they focus on relentlessly. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Students make satisfactory academic progress overall compared with their starting points, although this is better at Key Stage 3 than in their GCSE examinations. Good support helps students with learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as those from minority ethnic backgrounds, to progress as well as their peers. Standards are improving but remain below average. The school's recently implemented system for monitoring students' progress against their academic targets is used well to identify those in need of support. Effective intervention programmes, including literacy support, help these students to get back on target.

The school has experienced recent difficulties in recruiting teachers in some areas, and many staff are relatively new to teaching. Whilst there is some good and outstanding teaching, it is inconsistent across subjects, and teaching overall is satisfactory. Although target setting for students, and the tracking of their progress, are now good, insufficient use is made of the data to plan lessons effectively for the needs of individual students. In a few lessons, teaching is uninspiring, students lose concentration and the behaviour of a minority disrupts learning. In contrast, the best lessons challenge students to present and discuss their own ideas, and develop independent learning skills; students are provided with regular feedback on what they must do to improve further. Senior managers are aware that there is too much teaching that is no more than satisfactory, and are taking appropriate actions to effect improvements. The changes already made by the school are borne out by the positive comments from many students.

Students appreciate the outstanding curriculum, with academic and vocational options that fully meet their needs, whatever their abilities. Throughout the school there is an extensive range of cultural and personal development activities that enhances students' life at school. For example, the many concerts presented by the school are exemplary, as are the sporting activities, promoted through the school's specialism, and which attract high participation. Students speak favourably about the commitment of staff in providing good care and support throughout the school; as a result, the personal development of students is also good and they enjoy school. They make an excellent contribution to the community, both in and out of school. For example, younger students speak enthusiastically about the support provided by older students through vertical tutor groups; students are proud of how they sponsor 70 disadvantaged students from their link school in Zambia, and work as national Holocaust Ambassadors.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form leaders have a clear vision and a commitment to continual improvement. The excellent curriculum offers academic and vocational courses at all levels, responding well to the needs and aspirations of the students. Attainment is around the national average due to satisfactory teaching, and students make the progress expected from their starting points. Effective tracking of student progress shows that standards are improving in the current year. The good guidance and support are much valued, particularly by disadvantaged students.

Students overall personal development is outstanding. They enjoy school, behave in an exemplary manner and make an excellent contribution to the community. For example, student sports coaches run regular courses for the local community; child care students care for babies and toddlers on a regular basis whilst their mothers have a weekly swim. Younger students appreciate sixth formers' support through the vertical tutoring system, and local primary schools value their sports coaching. They become confident, mature and responsible adults who have the skills and abilities to progress easily into higher education or work. They are excellent ambassadors for the school and leave with a great sense of pride. As one 17 year old student commented, 'I love my school'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement of students in national tests and examinations.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that lessons meet the needs of all students, and that students know more precisely what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the consistency of monitoring and evaluation by middle managers to the level of the best.

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

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall, although they reach standards that are below the national average. The attainment of students when they enter the school in Year 7 is well below the national average, particularly at the higher levels. In Years 7 to 9 students make satisfactory progress and the downward trend in core subjects identified at the last inspection has been reversed. Achievement in mathematics is now good.

Attainment in GCSE exams in Year 11 is well below average. However, students make satisfactory progress compared with their starting points. Although attainment of the higher grades is below the national average, there is some variation between subjects, with students gaining better pass rates in art and design, science, drama and music, than in English literature, mathematics and PE. The school is fully aware of what needs to be done to raise standards. Through the robust student tracking system, the school can demonstrate that students' progress is improving across most subjects in the current year. This is supported by students who speak favourably about the improvements they are making.

The school analyses the performance of specific groups of students and takes good action to address any differences. For example, it runs separate revision classes for Bangladeshi students, and their parents, in the local community. As a result, there is little variation between the achievements of different groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students grow in confidence and self-esteem as they move through the school. They develop positive attitudes to learning, form good relationships with staff and each other, and enjoy school. The behaviour of students has improved around the school through the implementation of the Behaviour Team. As a result, behaviour is satisfactory and the level of exclusions has decreased significantly. Where incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour do occur, they are dealt with

promptly and effectively. The school works closely with a wide range of external agencies to promote community cohesion. The local police speak positively about the effect the good culture of the school is having on reducing teenage crime on the nearby housing estate.

Students' attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. They feel safe in school and know to whom they can turn for support. They are aware of the need for healthy lifestyles and many participate in sport. However, this does not always lead to healthy eating out of school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They understand about different cultures and beliefs, and participate in many social and cultural activities, such as music concerts nationally and abroad.

Students have a particularly strong voice in the school, for example in contributing to staff training and appointments, and making decisions about tutor groups. Their good personal development, together with the range of work experience and vocational studies, prepare them well for future employment. However, the school acknowledges the need to develop further the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Improvements in teaching and learning have resulted in better achievement, although staff recruitment difficulties have led to variable standards in some subjects. Good monitoring systems, and the work of the Pedagogy Team, lead to a more consistent approach to lessons. The overall quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory, with examples of some good and outstanding practice. In the better lessons, activities are varied, linked to prior learning, and motivate the students to learn. Students are encouraged to work in groups, as well as to develop skills to learn independently, and the well-paced lessons ensure that the students make good progress. For example, in an outstanding drama lesson, the students evaluated each other's work and applied a range of skills independently to effect improvement.

In less successful lessons, limited use is made of assessment to plan for the needs of all students, and to help students know how to improve their work. Students are given limited opportunities to apply their skills independently; this impedes their progress over time. In a few lessons, where the pace is slow, students lose concentration, and a minority sometimes disrupt the work of others. However, as one student commented, 'The teaching has changed this year; it has become more active and interesting'. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well to make progress similar to their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an outstanding curriculum at all key stages. In Years 7 to 9 the school has energetically embraced national initiatives and has developed imaginative strategies which enable students to follow programmes tailored to their individual needs. The variety of vocational and academic courses for older students successfully ensures that most are motivated to succeed and provides excellent pathways into, and within, the sixth form and into employment.

The needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well met, and the school provides an inclusive 'community curriculum' for both student and adult learners. The school has been particularly innovative and successful in introducing courses for students taking entry level qualifications. Students are encouraged to broaden their horizons through a wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially in sport, music and drama. They have access to extended

work experience opportunities, and the personal, social and health education (PSHE)/citizenship programme contributes much to their enjoyment of school life.

The school's specialist status in sport is at the heart of its response to national initiatives, community projects and subject development, and supports the school's slogan 'Where Learning and Sport Meet'. There is high participation in the many sporting activities, with opportunities for involvement of students in local, national and international sporting communities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Harmonious relationships ensure that students feel safe and well cared for. Risk assessment and safeguarding arrangements for students are robust and secure. The school works extremely well with partner primary schools to ensure that new students settle quickly and happily into Year 7. The guidance for students on the next stages of education or employment is good.

Students are set aspirational targets, and most know what they need to do to achieve them. However, the school recognises the need for greater rigour in reviewing targets and in providing more precise information to enable students to reach the next level. The school provides exceptionally well for vulnerable students, who are happy and settled at school. The small amount of bullying that does occur is dealt with very well and students have complete confidence that the school will resolve problems quickly and effectively. As one student commented, 'It is like being at home - everyone cares and there's always someone to go to'. Links with outside agencies are excellent and ensure that not only students, but also their families, receive effective and timely support. Good communications exist with parents and the community, reflected in the improving levels of attendance at parents' evenings and school events.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The head teacher has a clear vision and a strong sense of direction for the school. He leads by example around the school and in the classroom, demonstrating the involvement with students that he expects from all staff. He is ably supported by a strong and cohesive senior leadership team that motivates and supports staff and students well. Governors are involved in strategic decisions and their good knowledge of the school allows them to provide effective challenge and support; with the senior leaders, they promote the school in the wider community with real conviction.

Middle leaders are set challenging targets; marked improvements can clearly be seen, resulting in rising standards. Staff at all levels, including newly qualified teachers, value the support by the senior leaders who monitor teaching and learning and ensure there is a regular cycle of quality assurance.

The school knows its strengths and weaknesses, identifying what needs to improve and the strategies required to accomplish this. Over the last three years, effective resource management has removed a significant financial deficit. Resources are deployed well and directed towards raising standards. The school works very effectively with external agencies and partners to support the education and care of its students. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the Leon vision, and the school is very inclusive. It has a good capacity to continue to improve.

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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	2
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	3	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	2

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 interest of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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.

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

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

19 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Leon School and Sports College, Milton Keynes, MK2 3HQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff, and visiting lessons. Many of you told us how the caring and supportive environment, and your good relationships with teachers, meant that you enjoy school and feel safe there. We judged your school to be a very caring school that is providing you with a satisfactory education. We were particularly impressed by:

- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of its staff to help you to gain good results in your tests and exams
- your personal development, particularly in the sixth form, due to the good support that you receive and the school's emphasis on positive attitudes
- the courses and other activities available to provide you with the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- raises the overall quality of teaching and learning to enable you to improve your results at GCSE, and in your A and AS level examinations
- ensures that lessons meet the needs of all students, and that students know more precisely what they need to do to improve
- improves the consistency of how managers review the performance of their teams so that they can produce clear actions to help you make even better progress.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Fletcher
Her Majesty's Inspector