

Islington Arts and Media School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131690
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	315852
Inspection dates	9–10 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	893
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Victoria Phillips
Headteacher	Mr Richard Ewen
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Turle Road London N4 3LS
Telephone number	020 7281 3302
Fax number	020 7281 5514

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Islington Arts and Media Specialist College serves students from a four-mile- wide area that is very diverse, socially, economically and culturally. Three quarters of the students, a much higher proportion than average, come from a wide spectrum of minority ethnic heritages with many at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is very high as is the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These mainly include students with poor communication skills and a small number who have very limited mobility. High numbers of students join or leave the school at other than standard times. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Attainment on entry is well below average for most year groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Islington Arts and Media Specialist College (IAMS) is a good and rapidly improving school with some outstanding features. It has made excellent progress since the last inspection, not least because of the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and his very able and committed senior team. Staff at all levels give full-hearted support to these efforts and recognise that 'IAMS is a good place to be'. Parents, too, are generally supportive of the school despite few written responses to questionnaires. One commented on how well the school enables students to develop into 'well-rounded young people'. Students also appreciate the calm, purposeful learning environment that shelters them from many external pressures. 'Teachers respect us here' said a Year 9 student.

The improvements at IAMS owe much to the determination of the school to ensure 'security, continuity and creativity' in its work with the students. Its very inclusive ethos is a real strength that supports the majority of students, sometimes with very complex needs, to remain in school. As a result, attendance has improved and exclusions are much reduced. Many students now enjoy learning and convincingly assured inspectors that they feel safe in school. Many are very active participants in sport, approve of the healthy menus in the canteen, and make a very early and purposeful start to the day through the breakfast clubs. Behaviour in lessons and around the well-kept site is good and relationships throughout the school are harmonious. Their personal development is good, as is their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. They live up well to the school's aspiration of all participating actively in 'today's education for tomorrow's world'. Many students make a difference to others through their work as peer mediators and junior sports leaders. They use their privileges as members of a performing arts and media college very successfully to bring music and theatre to their local communities.

Students are very effectively prepared for their future economic well-being and for the next stage of education. The majority of students make good academic progress because of the good teaching they experience. Standards are improving and although still below average, students attain particularly well in some subject areas, notably in the performing arts, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Despite very positive classroom experiences for students, however, the school is intensely aware that to raise standards further, all lessons must enhance students' literacy and language skills. It also recognises that not all marking of students' work matches the best practice in the school.

The excellent care, guidance and support that students receive, and the outstanding curriculum, underpin much of the school's success with its often very vulnerable students. Work-related activities and vocational courses are especially effective. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities benefit greatly from carefully managed and integrated support. Students are nurtured and encouraged through success in a wide range of academic and other activities, especially performing arts. Most students are clear as to their personal and academic targets and know generally the extent to which their current attainment matches up to expectations because of the detailed and frequent checks on their progress. Links with external agencies are exceptionally strong so that students and their families receive fast, helpful support.

IAMS has sustained a fast rate of progress between successive inspections and has demonstrated clearly that its vision for its future development is manageable. Its capacity to improve is strong. Students talk positively of their future educational plans and say that school has helped them 'achieve excellence' and 'made them feel good about themselves'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that in all lessons, teaching consistently enhances the students' literacy and language skills.
- Ensure that the best practice in marking written work is spread across all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of students join the school with well below average literacy and communication skills. Although overall standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 remain below average, most students achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Students with limited communication skills and those with little or no mobility also make good progress because of the high level of individual support. Students of African, Caribbean and Turkish heritages made the fastest progress. Able students currently in Years 10 and 11 have already gained higher GCSE grades in mathematics and ICT. The many students for whom English is an additional language make very rapid gains in fluency.

There was a small but encouraging rise in Year 11 examination results in 2007. Around a half of the students gained five or more A* to C GCSE grades and for a third of these students, the results included English and mathematics. Test results at the end of Year 9 have also shown a steady rise over a number of years with students, particularly those who attend regularly, making at least satisfactory progress. The latest results in English, mathematics and science rose by nine, twelve and eleven percentage points respectively although remaining below average.

The school narrowly missed its challenging targets because very long-term absentees were included in examination information. Examination results are still affected negatively by the many students at the early stages of English language and literacy development. Nevertheless, many vulnerable students with difficult histories and sometimes disrupted schooling make up much of the ground lost from earlier years as they go through the school. They make especially fast progress in mathematics and ICT, in vocational courses and in the performing arts, reflecting the school's specialist status.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are happy and responsible members of the school community and the overwhelming majority enjoy coming to school. Most behave well and attend regularly but a few find considerable difficulty in getting to morning school on time because of challenges in travelling and in getting out of bed. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good and is reflected in the students' agreed New Year resolutions of 'peace with each other' and in the respect for the views and values of others.

Students feel safe in school. They respond well to the highly effective personal, social and health education programme and very actively choose healthy options in 'the Byte'. Students participate well in physical activities and are seen even before school in a range of clubs. Many students make a strong contribution to school life through the school council and 'focus groups', the 'buddy' and mediator schemes, paired reading, and 'performing arts and media' activities. Older students are quick to encourage good behaviour when younger ones occasionally stray. The overwhelming majority of students are confident that their views matter and that they

make a valuable contribution to improving the school. They are active in the wider community through work in primary schools and through music and drama performances for local audiences. Students have responded well to the opportunities provided by work experience, vocational courses and careers guidance to prepare themselves well for future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Regular monitoring ensures that the school has an accurate evaluation of classroom practice. Training activities are well linked to developing further the less strong aspects of teaching. Currently there is a focus on enhancing literacy skills and on using ICT resources effectively.

Warm working relationships are reflected in the students' confidence in their teachers. This helps them to engage well in learning, as does teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects and their strong subject expertise. In an outstanding Year 8 science lesson on velocity and speed, students were genuinely excited by the use of ICT to bring the topic to life. Good pace, humour and high expectations of work and behaviour help students stay on task and concentrate well. Within the specialist performing arts and media area, students learn well because of the skilful and systematic management of the tasks planned. Although teachers assess students' work regularly, the school rightly recognises that some students would benefit from more detailed feedback on their written work. It is also aware that support for students' language development in lessons is not always well enough implemented.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and meets the needs and aspirations of students well. In Years 7 to 9, the school has developed imaginative and bold strategies that enable students to follow personalised programmes. The 'express curriculum' in Years 7 and 8 has received national recognition and has enabled many students not only to achieve early success in examinations but has also bolstered their sense of worth and confidence. The school's specialist status in performing arts and media is at the heart of the school's creative response to national initiatives, community projects and subject development.

There is an exceptionally wide range of option choices, particularly vocational courses, in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum is enriched particularly well by many exciting opportunities for work experience and work-related activities. Students are all involved in at least one performing arts subject and can access up to twelve language courses. The school day is extended from early morning by many out-of-hours activities including sports, visits, clubs and residential opportunities. The carefully targeted breakfast clubs are popular and used exceptionally successfully to settle students new to the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The needs of individuals are assessed exceptionally carefully. The school does everything in its power to make sure all students receive the help they need. Students report that problems are dealt with promptly and that there is 'always

someone to turn to' when the need arises. Good support from external agencies helps students overcome difficulties, including health problems. Well-considered rewards such as residential opportunities allocated for high levels of attendance and for excellent behaviour, support students' efforts well.

Students benefit greatly from mentoring sessions that address both personal needs and progress in studies. This has resulted in raised aspirations for many groups of students. Mentoring and target setting provide excellent individual academic guidance. Regular checks on students' progress and performance ensure that most students know how well they are doing across subjects. Many are well informed on how to improve classwork. Academic review days are much appreciated by students who respond well to manageable but challenging targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Some aspects are outstanding such as the shared vision and common sense of purpose among senior leaders who are ambitious for the students in their care. They have a relentless focus on students' progress. The visionary and highly effective leadership of the headteacher has nourished a sense of collective accountability among staff for school improvement. The impact is evident in the good personal development of the students, in the steady rise in examination results, in the innovative development of the curriculum, and in the excellent care, guidance and support for students. The school is rightly proud of its efforts to maintain an inclusive ethos, reflected in the at least satisfactory progress of all groups of students and has clearly demonstrated its very strong capacity to improve further.

Governance is excellent. Through regular meetings and fact-finding visits, governors ably challenge and support the school well, particularly in its drive for Trust status. They strike a happy balance between holding the school to account and not unduly disturbing its smooth day-to-day running. The well-led performing arts and media specialism makes an exceptionally valuable contribution to involving all students in the life of the school as well as to raising standards across the curriculum. It is central to the school's excellent links with community groups and other external agencies.

There is a strong and generally accurate culture of self-evaluation throughout the school. This is especially so at senior level. There is unevenness, however, in the rigour with which some middle leaders are yet able to manage their department's consistent implementation of support in lessons for students' language and literacy skills, and in the helpfulness of some marking of students' written work.

Teachers and support staff appreciate the school's positive and professional culture and regular training. The views of parents and students are sought regularly and used effectively to inform worthwhile changes. Support for vulnerable students, for example, has been more expertly co-ordinated because of parents' concerns. Students are rightly pleased with their part in procuring tablecloths and flowers for the canteen. They feel well involved in the school's future building projects.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
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

23 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Islington Arts and Media School, London, N4 3LS

After our visit to IAMS, we would like to share our findings with you. You made us very welcome and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to talk to us about their thoughts on the school and their work.

You think IAMS is a good school, we agree with you. The opportunities that you have, especially in performing and media arts, help you to achieve well overall. We are pleased you behave in a calm and sensible manner around the school showing consideration and respect for each other and your teachers. The commitment shown by your teachers and support staff to keep you safe in school is impressive. We know you appreciate this greatly. Many of you use the privilege of attending IAMS well to make a big difference to others through your support and care for younger students and through the many projects in the community.

You have an exceptional headteacher who is very well supported by other staff and governors. They are working tirelessly on your behalf to make sure you get the best possible education the school can provide, not least through planned new state-of-the-art buildings and facilities.

To make IAMS even better, we have asked your teachers to ensure that they all focus strongly on improving your skills in literacy in order for you to achieve higher grades across subjects. We have also asked them to make sure everyone of you knows how to improve your written work.

Despite your good attitudes to school and work, and despite the school's untiring efforts to help, there are a few of you who find getting to school on time difficult. This is sometimes because of travel challenges or through not setting the alarm! We would like those of you who experience this problem to work hard on it so that you do not miss valuable learning time.

We wish all of you at IAMS a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector