

Cantell Maths and Computing College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	116469
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	379264
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Christine Raeside 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	956
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Harris
Headteacher	Ruth Evans
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 September 2008
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Age group	11–16
Inspection date(s)	22–23 February 2012
Inspection number	370264



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Introduction

Inspection team

Christine Raeside

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michael O'Sullivan

Additional inspector

Desmond Dunne

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Janice Howkins

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 44 teachers and lessons, of which 12 were joint observations with members of the senior team. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to a number of lessons, sometimes accompanied by a senior leader. They held meetings with three groups of students, members of the governing body and school staff, including senior and middle leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, minutes of the governing body and school policies. They also analysed responses to inspection questionnaires completed by 136 parents and carers and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

Cantell is an average sized comprehensive school in Southampton. There are more boys than girls on roll. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The proportion who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is more than double the national average and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is three times higher than average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at the school action level of support is higher than usual, at 21%; the proportion with statements of special educational needs or at the school action plus level of support is broadly average. There are higher-than-average levels of instability and deprivation. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing. It meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory and improving school. In 2011 it achieved its highest ever GCSE results, with 52% of students attaining five or more passes at grade C or better, including English and mathematics. Given their much lower-than-average starting points, this just below average attainment is indicative of rapidly improving rates of progress. However good or better achievement is not yet sustained for all groups of students, in particular lower and middle ability girls. As a result achievement is satisfactory rather than good.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall, but much is good. A concerted approach to improving teaching by senior and middle leaders is evident in the best lessons, where close knowledge of students' wide-ranging individual learning needs informs planning. Activities are tightly focused and well-paced to maximise progress for all. Conversely, where teaching is only satisfactory, it is because a single approach takes too little account of varied needs so that the pace of learning is diminished. Students' understanding of how to improve is sometimes supported by clear and helpful marking; however, this is not consistent across all subjects or teachers.
- Most students behave well in lessons and around school. They are proud of their diverse and cohesive school community. Effective and imaginative systems of conflict resolution have helped to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions over time. However, behaviour is satisfactory because some disruption to learning still exists, sometimes linked to teacher absence or experience. Around the site, vivacious and exuberant behaviour, although good natured, can mar the otherwise calm and purposeful atmosphere.
- Students, their parents and carers and staff all speak of the changes and improvements to Cantell in recent years. The headteacher has established a culture which is now aspirational and ambitious for every individual. The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been effectively addressed. Senior leaders are rigorous and accurate in their evaluation of teaching; monitoring is effectively linked to performance management and training in order to raise standards.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards of attainment to at least the national average and increase rates of progress for all groups, especially girls who come into the school at or below average levels of attainment, by making sure that all teaching is consistently good and a higher proportion is outstanding. The school should ensure that all teachers:
 - plan lessons and adapt activities and tasks so that they meet the needs of the full range of students
 - have high expectations for all and ensure that learning is consistently well paced to maximise progress
 - regularly provide detailed and developmental feedback to students on how to improve their work through consistently high quality marking.
- Establish higher standards of behaviour both in lessons and around school so that no lessons are disrupted and break times are not marred by over-exuberant conduct.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

An unrelenting focus on achievement has accelerated rates of progress such that attainment has risen from a previously low base and the gap with national standards is rapidly closing. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers feel that their child is making good progress. This can be seen in the exceptional achievement of some groups of students, for example those who speak English as an additional language. Rates of progress have been uneven, however, for low and middle ability girls, who lag behind boys and behind girls nationally in the core subjects of English and mathematics. Although this situation is being redressed lower down the school, there has not yet been sustained improvement in outcomes for this group. Girls who enter the school with high prior attainment levels achieve very well. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, but thanks to improvements in provision and closer individual tracking, their progress is also picking up pace as they move through the school.

Students arrive at Cantell with significantly lower-than-average prior attainment. A high proportion transfer to the school at other than the conventional times, many of whom speak English as an additional language. The school meets the needs of this diverse range of students increasingly well. A past legacy of low attainment is reversing because good leadership has established higher expectations of learning and progress for all. Stronger, more consistent teaching and a meticulous approach

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to tracking and monitoring student achievement is having a major impact.

Students learn effectively in many lessons because they have a clear understanding of their levels and grades and of their ambitious achievement targets. They are keen to do well and apply themselves with enthusiasm to their learning. Year 7 'accelerating learning' lessons exemplify how the best teaching is supporting good progress. Coherent planning across the full range of classes is focused on developing literacy skills, with different tasks, texts and approaches tailored to the full range of needs. In these lessons, all groups of students focus on their work, collaborate well and make good progress. In a range of lessons observed, students with special educational needs expressed growing confidence in their reading and writing, girls participated purposefully and confidently in discussion, and a Portuguese speaker accessed learning with the help of a laptop computer in a lesson researching Charles Dickens. A combination of high expectations and effective planning secured good learning for all.

Quality of teaching

In the best lessons, learning is enhanced by excellent relationships and positive attitudes to learning. Teachers enable students to make highly effective use of assessment criteria to evaluate their own progress and plan next steps. In a Year 10 lesson, students acted as examiners, assessing a GCSE English language essay. They identified accurately and in detail how the candidate had met the criteria and graded it exactly as examiners had. They then re-evaluated their own recent performance and set themselves precise targets for improvement. This sparked a discussion and debate about the merit of concise against extended answers. Excellent teacher planning had facilitated mature and independent approaches to learning.

Curriculum planning enhances students' understanding of the wider world and enables reflection on moral issues. Year 7 students with low levels of basic literacy developed their skills through studying the words of Martin Luther King. Their learning and confidence were enhanced by the opportunity to reflect on the implications of his speech and discuss their understanding of human rights. In a citizenship lesson, Year 8 students showed sensitivity and maturity in discussing gun laws. Well-structured activities ensured that they used their listening skills well and could debate and develop their understanding responsibly.

Where teaching remains satisfactory it is often because very detailed information about the range of students' needs has not been used effectively to vary tasks, activities and materials. This limits the capacity of the lesson to provide challenge and maintain pace for everyone. Whole-school systems for gathering assessment information are now strong; students know their levels, grades and targets well. Their understanding of how to improve is supported by some good marking, which is developmental and linked to learning intentions. However, this is not a consistent picture; some books display limited productivity or poor presentation because there is an absence of helpful interaction with the teacher on how to improve.

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The impact of the school's focus on improving teaching is evident in the best lessons and in the growing proportion of good teaching. Parents and carers express confidence in teaching; most view it as good. Older students share this confidence and told inspectors how much teaching has improved in their time at the school, stating confidently that lessons now make much more effective use of time and prepare them well for their GCSEs. Inspectors agree that it is an improving picture, even though the impact on achievement is not yet secure and sustained for all groups of students.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The great majority of parents and carers feel that their child is safe at school. Students expressed similar confidence in their safety. Most said that bullying is uncommon and dealt with effectively. They showed a strong awareness of different types of bullying, for example knowledgeably discussing cyber-bullying and how they would deal with it. They are highly appreciative of the wide range of support mechanisms in place, such as family support workers and the inclusion area. Behaviour in lessons observed during the inspection was predominantly good. The majority of parents and carers agree that behaviour in lessons is generally good but a significant minority also feel that disruption does sometimes occur, a view supported by students. Inspectors agree that, despite considerable improvements in behaviour throughout the school, there is still some off-task talk or low-level disruption. Around the site, students mainly conduct themselves well. Some areas of outside space are cramped and quickly become crowded during breaks. At these times, some students show insufficient awareness of the impact of over-exuberant behaviour on others.

There has been a sharp increase in attendance this year, as a result of improved strategies to reduce unauthorised and persistent absence. Attendance is now in line with the national average and improving for all groups. The school is deeply committed to the effective inclusion of all students. It takes a lead role in the local 'fair access' arrangements, through which schools exchange particularly challenging or hard-to-place students in an effort to maintain their education. This has led to higher-than-average permanent exclusions, but also to some successful reintegration.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has successfully established a common drive for improvement among the staff. A robust intolerance of poor performance has led to considerable changes in staffing over time, but this has been managed effectively in pursuit of efficient, effective and cohesive teams. A 'no excuses' mantra pervades senior leadership. All school improvement work is underpinned by the passionately held central aim: 'to secure good rates of progression for every student through quality first teaching, rigorous tracking and effective intervention'. As a result the capacity for further sustained improvement is strong.

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Senior leaders are already focused on the priorities for improvement identified by the inspection team. The achievement of girls, for example, is closely monitored and tracking indicates ongoing improvements which will shortly eradicate the gap with boys' achievement. Provision for targeted or vulnerable groups has been overhauled in response to school self-evaluation and judicious use of external review. The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs is accelerating as a result.

The curriculum is founded on a GCSE core, with additional alternative qualifications matched to individual student needs. An appropriate focus on accelerating low literacy skills on entry is central to the well-developed Year 7 'accelerating learning' curriculum, recently enhanced by staff training in initial reading strategies. Several parents and carers commented on the effectiveness of transfer arrangements from primary school and how well the Year 7 curriculum builds on this good start.

Governors provide effective support and challenge to the school and work closely with senior leaders to secure improvements. Along with the headteacher and senior leaders, they have taken all necessary steps to secure effective safeguarding and training in child protection. Equality of opportunity is at the core of the school's drive to secure good progress for all and to leave no individual or group behind. One parent described Cantell as 'a remarkable school' which 'takes a very wide range of children yet manages to provide what's required for every individual'.

Students are encouraged and enabled to reflect on the experiences of others. The diversity of the school gives them first-hand knowledge of a range of cultural and religious experiences and backgrounds. The headteacher is determined that curriculum enhancement will include ambitious and life-changing opportunities, such as the World Challenge visit to Tanzania, where a group of Cantell students completed a week's community work in a rural school, painting walls and cementing floors, as well as trekking up Kilimanjaro.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	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 2010 to 31 August 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.
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.



24 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Cantell Maths and Computing College, Southampton SO16 3GJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. Many of you told us that Cantell has improved greatly in recent years and that your lessons are now more purposeful and enjoyable. You know how well you are doing and appreciate the measures your teachers take to ensure that you are well prepared to meet or exceed your GCSE and key stage targets.

We agree with you that your school, which is satisfactory overall, is improving. This is evident in examination results, which last year were the best yet. Assessment shows that you are continuing to build on this success. Given the wide range of students' backgrounds and abilities, this shows that many of you make good or even better progress throughout your time at school. This is not yet equally good for everyone, however. For example, boys have tended to do better than girls, although this gap is closing.

In many lessons you learn extremely well when teachers have high expectations of everyone in the class and ensure that the lesson moves swiftly through a variety of well-planned activities. Sometimes, however, the lesson loses pace because only one task is set and you make only satisfactory progress.

Generally, behaviour in lessons is good, but you told us, as did your parents and carers, that it is variable at times, and that a few students do disrupt learning. We have asked your teachers to ensure that behaviour in lessons is always good, with no exceptions. You mix well together and are respectful of one another's backgrounds and beliefs. Around school, the atmosphere is usually friendly and lively. Some of you, however, can become over-exuberant and forget that this can be unsettling to others.

You can help with the continued improvement of your school, by:

- getting fully and actively involved in all lessons
- working hard to meet and exceed your achievement and attendance targets
- sharing responsibility for, and contributing to, the school's calm and purposeful atmosphere, including during break times.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

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