

Stroud High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115753
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	357814
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Daniel Burton

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	870
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jacqui Phillips
Headteacher	Mr Tim Withers
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2007
School address	Beards Lane Stroud GL5 4HF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 28 lessons and 28 teachers. They also observed a wide range of activities which took place as part of a curriculum enrichment day. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies, data and analyses, including the school's self-evaluation, the governing body minutes, and 131 questionnaires completed by parents and carers. They also looked at questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- Students' progress in the sixth form.
- The impact and quality of partnership working, particularly in the sixth form.
- The effectiveness of the school's work to promote the outstanding personal development of all groups of learners, particularly those whose circumstances potentially make them more vulnerable.
- The impact of leadership and management at all levels on driving improvement since the last inspection.

Information about the school

This selective girls' school accepts students from a very wide geographical area and over 60 primary schools. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very low, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is a specialist science college and, since the last inspection, has gained a second specialism in modern foreign languages. Sixth form provision is provided in partnership with a neighbouring boys' grammar school and the school also accepts post-16 students from other schools and works within the Stroud Post-16 Consortium.

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: how good is the school?**1****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****1**

Main findings

Girls thrive at this excellent school. Outstanding academic achievement is matched by exceptional personal development. Stroud High School students are confident, articulate and exceptionally well behaved. Their industry in lessons is matched by their commitment to making the most of the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school. Girls get on extremely well with each other and benefit from the excellent relationships they enjoy with their teachers. Their willingness to support their friends and other members of the school community ensures that they learn in an environment where everyone feels safe, supported and valued. One parent, summarising the views of many others, commented, 'Since joining the school, we have seen our daughter blossom.'

Students' outstanding attributes are not achieved by chance. Students excel because good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching is underpinned by an excellent curriculum and exceptional provision for care, guidance and support. Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have very carefully built on the school's many areas of strength in the main school while tackling, decisively, the few remaining areas of weakness. As a result, achievement, judged to be good at the time of the last inspection, has been strengthened and is now outstanding. In 2010, the school secured its best ever examination results with 76% of all GCSE grades awarded at grades A or A*. Equally important, the school has been markedly successful in ensuring that girls who find lessons more challenging fulfil their potential. As a result, all groups of learners make good progress by the end of Year 11 and for many, progress is outstanding.

Leaders and managers know that, while progress in the sixth form for many students is good, there remains too much variation in students' achievement between subjects, which means progress remains satisfactory overall. This, in part, is explained by the complexities presented by partnership working with the neighbouring boys' grammar school. In recent years, these difficulties have hindered the school's capacity to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision in the sixth form with sufficient rigour. As a result, strategies to address variable achievement between subjects have not been sufficiently well developed. In addition, while leaders and managers have secured marked success in raising sixth form attendance, systems have not yet had sufficient impact in reducing the small proportion of girls with low attendance. Nevertheless, outcomes for students in the sixth form are good, with a high proportion of A-level grades awarded at grades A* to B, and most girls secure entry to their first-choice university. Crucially, the partnership has recently been strengthened through a completely revised management structure which is resulting in much more coherent and effective leadership than before. The two schools have now established clear protocols for partnership working and improved links between them are now developing rapidly. This increased capacity in the sixth form has been further enhanced by the appointment of an excellent head of girls' sixth form. While far greater levels of accountability than before have now been secured, leaders and managers

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know that it is now time to monitor more closely the quality of teaching across the partnership.

Staff are united in their determination to ensure that the quality of the sixth form matches the outstanding provision in the main school. Their success in driving up achievement and strengthening all aspects of provision in the main school demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity to improve still further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the sixth form provides the same outstanding quality of education as seen in the main school by:
 - rapidly strengthening procedures to monitor the quality of provision, particularly teaching and learning, across the partnership
 - reducing the variability in achievement between subjects
 - eradicating poor attendance in the sixth form.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

- Students enjoy coming to school and say they feel extremely safe, not least because of the excellent work of the school's student support services, who they know will support them if ever they need any help or advice. They value the school's positive behaviour management systems which recognise their typically excellent conduct.
- The girls are highly committed to living healthy lifestyles and the proportion of students who participate in three hours' high quality sport each week is significantly above the national average. Similarly, far more students take advantage of the healthy meals provided in the school canteen than usually seen, though some girls report that they are frustrated by the long queues.
- Students are heavily involved in the wider life of the school, through their high participation in the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities and through their willingness to take-up the wide range of leadership positions available, for example through the developing student leadership 'hub' system or through mentoring younger students.
- Students behave impeccably in lessons and respond extremely well to the challenging and well-crafted activities planned by their teachers. They thrive when given opportunities to work in teams and to express their own ideas but also work diligently and with focus when asked to work independently. In most lessons, students make good progress and, in some lessons, their progress is outstanding. In the best lessons, for example in English, all groups of students make excellent progress because teaching ensures that all are involved at all stages of the lesson. In a few lessons, some students become too passive because strategies to test understanding, for example, through question and answer sessions, are not fully successful in involving the whole group.
- In lessons seen and over time, students with special educational needs make the same good, and sometimes outstanding, progress as their peers.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

- Teaching benefits from teachers' expert subject knowledge which enables staff to prepare students for public examinations, especially GCSEs, extremely well. Lessons are planned in detail and supported by high quality resources. In many lessons, teachers use an imaginative range of activities to ensure that all groups of students are engaged and enthused. When teaching is most effective, opportunities for students to take charge of their own learning are matched by high levels of pace and intellectual challenge. Excellent use of assessment ensures that activities are tailored to enable all students to do their best, despite any variations in prior attainment. In one outstanding philosophy and ethics lesson, students made excellent progress because the teacher carefully allocated activities according to the ability of each student. This ensured that, while all students were challenged, less-able students were well supported so that, by the end of the lesson, all had made excellent progress in deepening their understanding of complex philosophical concepts. In a few lessons, teachers make less effective use of this detailed assessment information to ensure that learning provides sufficient support and challenge for the whole group. Marking, combined with some excellent practice in peer- and self-assessment, ensures that most students know how well they are doing and how they can improve.

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- The school's outstanding academic curriculum is matched by first-class provision for personal development. A wide range of academic subjects is offered and links have been established with other local providers to provide additional courses for the small number of students who wish to study more vocational subjects. Students' wider development is enhanced by a highly regarded personal development programme and the school's innovative Triple A award. The six annual curriculum enrichment days meet the needs and interests of different groups of learners well and form part of an extremely coherent programme to promote students' wider development. Excellent provision for further enrichment is ensured through an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities including art, drama, music and sports. The school ensures that much of this provision is available at lunchtime to ensure that those who travel long distances to school are fully able to participate. The curriculum is enhanced by some innovative links with local businesses which, in one instance, resulted in students helping to improve the manufacturing processes of a local company.
- The school provides excellent care for all groups of students and monitors the well-being, personal development and achievement of students facing more challenging circumstances with particular care to ensure their needs are fully met. Students thrive because the school's focus on 'personal best' ensures that all students know that they are valued as individuals. Comprehensive systems to support those at risk of falling behind in their studies are underpinned by an excellent programme of pastoral support. The work of the school's student support service is strengthened by excellent partnership arrangements with specialist agencies. This ensures that girls have access to professional counselling should they need it and to the services of the school nurse. These services are highly valued by students and are given a high profile in assemblies and through the school's intranet. Arrangements for transition into the school are excellent and highly valued by parents of Year 7 students. Similarly, the school ensures that students are well supported through Connexions interviews as they pass through major transition points. As a result, all students either progress into the sixth form, into education elsewhere or into employment at the end of Year 11.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

- Leaders and managers at all levels have been conspicuously successful in driving improvement and embedding ambition since the last inspection. The headteacher and his team have challenged staff to improve their strong performance still further

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through more ambitious target-setting accompanied by strategies to strengthen teachers' skills in meeting the needs of the most-able. As a result, the proportion of students attaining the very highest grades in public examinations has improved significantly. Procedures to monitor and track the academic progress and well-being of different groups of learners have been strengthened with the result that the school is much more effective in addressing areas of underperformance than before. Subject leaders and pastoral staff work closely in tandem to maximise achievement for all students, exemplifying the school's extremely effective strategies to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination.

- Partnerships with local schools are strengthened by the school's specialist science status and the school has initiated a range of activities to promote family learning through its more recent specialism in modern foreign languages. Plans are in place to develop the impact of the specialism further as a result of improved leadership and management arrangements.
- Leadership is enhanced through excellent governance arrangements which have helped steer the school through some significant challenges regarding the infrastructure of the school. Careful and strategic financial planning has enabled the school to make significant improvements to the school site and more are planned. Governors have an acute understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and share the determination of the rest of the staff to improve provision still further.
- The school is an exceptionally cohesive community where girls of all ages get along extremely well together. Students' understanding of the wider international community is enhanced through excellent initiatives such as the Afri-twin scheme and regular exchanges to countries in Europe. The school also ensures students have a good understanding of diversity within the United Kingdom, although opportunities to gain direct first-hand experience of other communities are less well developed.
- Provision for safeguarding students is good and statutory requirements fully met. Improved systems to control access to the school site are recognised and appreciated by students, as is the school's work to minimise the risks associated with the roads and the nearby rail network.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

This good and improving sixth form now successfully secures far more applications from external candidates than before. While students make good progress in lessons as a result of good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching, their progress over time and across subjects remains satisfactory. This is linked to variations in achievement between subjects. However, strengthened partnership arrangements are now beginning to accelerate progress overall and address inconsistencies in student performance between subjects. Students are excellent ambassadors for their school and role models for the rest of the school community. They benefit from good opportunities to develop a wider range of skills, for example, through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or expeditions organised through World Challenge. They also make a significant contribution to the school community through mentoring arrangements for younger girls and by taking on the leadership of the school's hubs. Students are extremely positive about the impact of new leadership arrangements in the sixth form and recognise that provision has improved quickly since September. Tutor periods are more purposeful than before and provision for information and guidance is now well organised. However, while students report that many aspects of care are outstanding, they judge that the excellent guidance they receive with regard to Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) applications is not offered early enough.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The inspection team received a similar proportion of parental questionnaires as seen in other secondary schools. Parents and carers who chose to respond to the questionnaires were highly supportive of the work of the school and 96% of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school.' A number of parents and carers of Year 7 students made particularly positive comments with regard to the quality of transition arrangements into the school. Others commented on how well the school had helped their child overcome particular challenges or difficulties through excellent pastoral support. A few parents and carers made negative comments with regard to the school's recent drive to raise the standards seen in the school uniform. Inspectors investigated this and other issues with regard to leadership and management during this inspection and judged that the leadership of the school is outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stroud High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 131 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 131 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 870 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	87	66	42	32	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	83	64	43	33	4	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	57	44	67	51	5	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	58	49	37	3	2	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	59	45	67	51	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	36	62	47	19	15	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	34	64	49	21	16	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	62	47	53	40	7	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	75	57	48	37	5	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	39	63	48	6	5	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	30	62	47	16	12	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	67	51	46	35	12	9	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	85	65	40	31	3	2	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



10 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Stroud High School, Stroud GL5 4HF

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to inspectors when we recently visited your school. Here are our main findings, though I hope many of you will read the full inspection report.

- Your school provides an outstanding quality of education where your outstanding academic achievement is matched by exceptional personal development.
- Your industry in lessons is matched by your commitment to making the most of the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school.
- You get on extremely well with each other and your willingness to support your friends and other members of the school community ensures that you learn in an environment where everyone feels safe, supported and valued.
- You achieve well because consistently good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching is underpinned by an excellent curriculum and exceptional provision for care, guidance and support.
- Staff know you as individuals and make sure that each of you fulfils your potential, whatever your individual needs and interests.

Your headteacher and his team know that the sixth form, although good, is not yet as effective as the rest of the school, and we have asked that they quickly put into place some of the improvements which have been planned. In particular, we have asked that they:

- rapidly strengthen procedures for monitoring the quality of provision, particularly teaching and learning, across the sixth form partnership
- reduce the variability in achievement between subjects in the sixth form
- eradicate poor attendance in the sixth form.

Those of you in the sixth form can help by ensuring that you always attend registration and tutor periods.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector

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