

The Netherhall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110873
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	356827
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1296
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	300
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr David Goulder
Principal	Caroline McKenney
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2008
School address	Queen Edith's Way Cambridge CB1 8NN
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 36 part-lessons in the main school and 11 in the sixth form. They held meetings with senior and middle managers, members of the governing body and three groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including 335 questionnaires from parents and 154 from students.

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

- whether all individuals and groups of students are making sufficient progress
- whether the curriculum meets the needs of all learners
- the impact of the school's specialism in sport on the quality of teaching and its contribution to raising overall standards
- the impact of leaders and managers on securing sustained improvements to the school.

Information about the school

The Netherhall School is a larger than average comprehensive school. Students come from a diverse range of backgrounds; the majority are White British but the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Eastern European, but also Indian, Chinese and Bangladeshi, is much higher than the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, mostly dyslexia or behavioural, emotional and social needs, is similar to the national average. A lower than average percentage of students has a statement of special educational need. Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a significant building programme and, from September this year, students in all key stages have been taught on a single site. The school is a specialist sports college and a training school. It holds the Sportsmark, Artsmark, Inclusion Mark, Information and Communication Technology Mark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Cultural Diversity Quality Standard and the Investors in People awards.

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?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

The Netherhall School and Sixth Form Centre is a satisfactory and improving school. It has a number of good and outstanding features; most notably students' adoption of healthy lifestyles, their involvement in their school and the wider community, and the school's contribution to promoting community cohesion. It prides itself in being an inclusive school in which students from diverse backgrounds mix together well, enjoy school life and are well prepared for their future lives. They feel safe, respect each other and behave well. Students of all abilities receive good care, guidance and support at each stage of their education which helps them to settle into school quickly and attend regularly. Students speak favourably about the extensive range of curricular and enrichment opportunities available to them.

The relocation of Key Stage 3 provision onto a single site has created an excellent environment in which to learn. Planning for this move has absorbed a significant amount of senior leaders' time. This, together with a lack of accurate assessment information about how well students are progressing has had an adverse effect on students' attainment which has fallen during this period. This year, results improved significantly; the percentage of students attaining five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics is above the national average. This improvement was due to more rigorous monitoring by senior leaders and additional support targeted towards specific students in Year 11. These procedures are now being embedded to ensure that all students in Key Stage 4 achieve what is expected of them this year.

Observations of lessons by inspectors found that, based on their broadly average starting points, most students are making at least satisfactory progress. Their rate of progress varies according to quality of teaching which is mostly satisfactory, often good and occasionally outstanding. Good relations between staff and students coupled with detailed subject knowledge form the basis of effective teaching. Behaviour is managed well and students thrive on the praise and encouragement they receive. Common weaknesses seen in many lessons include the limited opportunities for students to learn independently at their own pace rather than that of the teacher, and lesson planning that does not incorporate different learning activities suited to the abilities and interests of all students.

A satisfactory curriculum provides a broad choice of GCSEs and a small but increasing number of vocational awards. Physical education and sport share a high profile in the school and add significantly to students' well-being and achievement. Students enthuse about the range of enrichment activities available, particularly in sports and the arts. Despite these strengths, school leaders acknowledge that average and lower ability students are less well served by the curriculum and leaders have prioritised further provision of vocational learning on the school site and in partnership with other providers. Good pastoral care and support adds significantly to students' enjoyment of school.

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Transition arrangements for those joining the school are well established and the vast majority of Year 11 students receive good guidance to prepare them for sixth-form study or employment.

The principal is relentless in her desire to achieve the very best for the school. Ably supported by her team of senior leaders, she has led the school well through a period of major building and a reduction in staffing. Currently, staff morale is high. Capacity to improve further is satisfactory. Senior leaders' actions to reverse the trend of falling results have worked well but they acknowledge that the systematic use of assessment data to track students' progress in all years is not firmly embedded. Self-evaluation is otherwise largely accurate. School improvement plans rightly prioritise promoting better quality teaching and developing a broader curriculum. The governing body ensures that its statutory duties are met, including safeguarding. It provides good support and challenge for the principal and plays a key role in steering the strategic development of the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in the large majority of lessons by September 2012 by:
 - increasing opportunities for students to learn independently
 - incorporating a range of different learning activities in lessons matched to the abilities and interests of all students
 - raising teachers' expectations of all students and sharing good practice.
 - Raise the achievement of students of different abilities and interests by extending curriculum choice and offering a broader range of vocational courses on the school site and in partnership with other providers.
- Build on the improved results achieved in 2010 by:
 - firmly embedding new procedures to systematically monitor the progress of all individual students
 - ensuring all staff develop a thorough understanding of how to use assessment data to raise student achievement.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment in Key Stage 3 is consistently at or above national averages and this trend is expected to continue this year. The percentages of students meeting the expected levels in English and mathematics has risen year on year for the past three years. Progress slows in Key Stage 4, particularly for students of average and lower ability, mainly because lessons are not always planned to meet their needs and assessments of their performance are not carried out systematically. Boys and girls achieve equally as well. The additional support provided for students that have special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that they also achieve satisfactorily. The most able students achieve well; the proportion of them attaining three or more A* and A grades has increased each year since

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the last inspection. The percentage of boys and girls attaining five or more A* to C grades is similar to the national average but a lack of vocational learning opportunities restricts the achievement of those not suited to GCSE studies. The very large majority of students usually attain at least five GCSE A* to G grades.

The concerns raised in the last inspection about student absence have been fully addressed; current attendance is above the national average and rates of persistent absence are low. Students told inspectors that bullying is rare but when it occurs it is dealt with promptly. The school's specialism in sport makes an excellent contribution to students' health and well-being. All students receive at least two hours of physical education each week and participation rates in sport are high. An active school council ensures that the views of students are listened to. A large proportion of students engage with the local community through fundraising events, supporting charities and volunteering as young leaders to work with primary-aged children. The school hosts the local sports partnership and its facilities are used extensively to promote community sport. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted well through a wide range of music, arts events and established links with other schools and colleges, both locally and abroad.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

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How effective is the provision?

Joint observations by inspectors and senior leaders confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. In the most effective lessons, teachers give students time to plan their work, talk with others in small groups and evaluate how well they were doing. At times, teachers' expectations are too low and some students are not sufficiently challenged. Inspectors also found that many lessons were dominated by too much teacher talk, requiring students to sit and listen for extended periods of time with few opportunities to contribute their own ideas. Teachers collect a range of assessment data but the use of this information to track students' progress lacks consistency and does not always ensure that they achieve their targets. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective additional support outside of lessons but teaching assistants are not deployed in some classes with large numbers of these students.

Students select freely from a wide range of GCSE courses. A choice of three sciences and three languages meet the needs of the most able students and results achieved in these courses are often well above national averages. An increased number of vocational courses have been introduced to complement existing GCSE provision and some, such as the BTEC sport award, are well established. The school is forging partnerships with other providers to increase access to diplomas and other awards this year. All students benefit from work experience. The quality of care and support for students for whom English is not their first language is exemplary, which helps them integrate and achieve equally as well as others.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The recognition by senior leaders and the governing body that outcomes for students were not as high as they should be, and their decisive action to address this have been the key factors in instigating improvement. Their monitoring shows that, although satisfactory, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. They know where the strengths and weaknesses lie in their middle leaders, most of whom know how to raise achievement in their subjects but show less awareness of generating improvements across the school.

The school's own support staff and strong partnerships with external support agencies help to promote equality of opportunity, tackle discrimination and celebrate the cultural diversity of its students. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Community cohesion is outstanding; senior leaders know the context and character of the school well. Students display a strong understanding of the school and its wider community, and they celebrate

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its cultural diversity. For example, a World Cup football competition to promote the qualities of personal excellence, respect, inspiration, determination and equality (pride) included teams representing different countries with over 40 languages being spoken through anthems, lyrics and sporting pledges.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form provides students with a satisfactory and improving education. Student numbers have steadily increased in recent years. An increasing proportion of students transfer from Year 11 into Year 12 but the majority join from other schools. Almost all pursue Advanced level courses. This year, a small proportion completed GCSE courses. The majority of students who start in Year 12 continue their studies in Year 13. Attainment has risen steadily since the last inspection but fell below national averages this year, reflecting a weaker cohort of students than those previously. Based on their starting points, most students make satisfactory progress and current data suggests this will continue this year. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory to outstanding but overall it is satisfactory. Students told inspectors that they enjoy learning when teachers use a variety of interactive methods and encourage them to critically evaluate their work with others. The quality of assessment, marking and tracking of their progress varies between subjects.

Students attend regularly and feel that their pastoral needs are fully met. A broad range of enrichment activities adds to students' enjoyment of the sixth form. They receive good care, guidance and support. The vast majority of them move into higher education. The sixth form is ably led by an experienced member of the senior leadership team, supported by two capable deputy leaders who ensure that all students receive the care and support they need to integrate well into the sixth form. Their monitoring of teaching is regular but

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a number of lessons do not include opportunities for students to discuss issues in depth or learn independently.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with the education provided and the communication they have with the school. Many parental questionnaires included comments praising the work of the school. A minority of parents would like more help to support their child's learning and feel the school does not always take account of their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors found no evidence to support this and noted a range of strategies including a support group to share the views of parents. A minority of parents also disagreed that the school manages behaviour effectively but during the inspection inspectors found students behaviour to be consistently good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Netherhall 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 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 335 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1314 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	145	41	197	56	5	1	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	137	39	200	57	6	2	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	124	35	191	55	16	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	114	33	194	55	27	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	114	33	213	60	11	3	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	86	25	201	57	42	12	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	94	27	205	59	39	11	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)	117	33	200	57	9	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	105	30	211	60	17	5	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	89	25	194	55	34	10	10	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	77	22	192	55	39	11	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	120	34	197	56	14	4	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	149	43	178	51	12	3	1	0

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.



20 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Netherhall School, Cambridge, CB1 8NN

We recently visited your school and found it to be satisfactory, but with a number of good and outstanding features. Thank you for allowing us to join you in lessons and to talk with you. You represented your school well. We also met with your senior teachers, governors and read letters from some of your parents. Throughout the inspection you behaved well and made all members of the inspection team feel welcome.

We were pleased to see that you lead healthy lifestyles, enjoy physical education and sport. We noted the excellent roles you play in school and in the wider community, especially as young leaders. We were most impressed with how students from diverse backgrounds mix together so well and enjoy school life. You told us that you feel safe and free from bullying. You feel that you receive good care, guidance and support to help you to settle into school quickly, attend regularly and select the right courses to pursue. However, not all of you achieve what you are capable of during Key Stage 4. For that reason, we have asked your senior leaders and the governing body to make the following improvements.

Increase the opportunities for you to learn independently and in small groups in a range of different activities in lessons matched to your abilities and interests.

Extend curriculum choice by offering you a broader range of vocational courses at Netherhall and at other schools in the city.

Systematically monitor your progress using accurate assessment data.

Your school is led effectively by Mrs McKenney. You can all help her by sharing your views with her about what other improvements you would like to see.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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