

The Cooper School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123234
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	359401
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2011
Reporting inspector	David Radomsky

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	981
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Dunne
Headteacher	Ben Baxter
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
School address	Churchill Road Bicester OX26 4RS
Telephone number	01869242121
Fax number	01869 362693
Email address	head.4032@cooper.ocnmail.net

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2011
Inspection number	359401

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 39 lessons taught by 37 teachers and meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised policies, monitoring information, data about past performance and the school and departmental improvement plans. The team analysed the 194 parental and carer questionnaires, 68 completed by staff and 164 by students.

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

- How well all tiers of leadership and management are supporting and driving improvement, particularly through tackling any inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment
- How effectively the school is supporting the more-able students as well as the average ability boys to make accelerated progress.
- The actions taken by the school and its predicted success to improve the percentages of high grades at GCSE, and predictions for 2011 results.

Information about the school

The Cooper School is an average sized school with science specialist status. A well below average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is well below average as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, most having specific or mild learning difficulties, or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The number with statements of special educational needs is below average. The school is opening a new sixth form centre in September 2011 and will change status from an 1116 to 1118 provider. The school has a range of accreditations and, since the last inspection, these include Eco School status.

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

This is an outstanding school which continuously strives to improve further. The headteacher, ably assisted by his senior team, has been the driving force in leading improvement and raising aspirations. As one parent put it, 'The school has moved from strength to strength and our children love their school. They feel happy, exceptionally safe and secure, the curriculum is extremely well tailored to meet their needs and teachers inspire them. The headteacher and staff have drive and rigour in all that they do.'

The school knows itself well through rigorous selfevaluation. Clear priority setting, informed by these good routines, has meant that there has been a sustained upward trajectory in students' attainment. Since the last inspection, this has risen to above average attainment and the rates of progress are now good and occasionally outstanding. Students achieve well through the school. Gaps between the performances across different subjects are narrowing and there are diminishing differences between boys' and girls' attainment. Good systems are in place for tracking students' achievements and for supporting those who are not meeting expectations. Senior and many middle leaders support the teaching skills of staff well. A few middle leaders, however, do not have the expertise to develop further their colleagues' teaching skills to ensure consistently good or better student progress. The school's popularity in the local community has increased noticeably. Consequently, applications for the planned sixth form due to open in September far exceed the places available. The school has consolidated the many recent successes, and leaders have galvanised the enthusiasm and commitment of staff, and much has been achieved. Recent significant improvements, combined with strong support from the governing body, demonstrate that the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Students receive outstanding care and support. Consequently, they enjoy school and attendance is high. Key factors in this are an outstanding and innovative curriculum which meets the needs and aspirations of all students, the positive impact the areas of specialism have on provision including the use of new technologies to enhance learning, and the wide-ranging enrichment programme. Excellent links with outside agencies and good engagement with parents and carers contribute significantly to the strengths in students' personal development, well-being and academic achievement. Students value the way they are supported and say they feel very safe at all times and that they are enabled to make well-informed choices about their futures and pursue healthy lifestyles. They make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community.

The quality of teaching is good. While a few lessons observed during the inspection were outstanding and many were good, there remains a small minority of teaching that is satisfactory. Occasionally, planning does not take into account the full range of needs and abilities, such as those of the more able students, and consequently progress in those

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

lessons slows. Most teachers ensure that their students receive good guidance on how to improve their work, but in a small minority of cases guidance lacks adequate detail and insufficient opportunities are given to students to respond and follow up on teachers' comments and learn from their mistakes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise students' attainment further in 2012 by:
 - spreading the good and outstanding practice in teaching so that a range of learning activities is regularly planned to meet the needs of all students
 - ensuring marking consistently gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work and ensuring such guidance is regularly followed up
 - providing support and training to less experienced subject leaders so they can improve the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students are proud of their school and enjoy their lessons a great deal. The level of commitment to their work is high and they collaborate well when working in groups or in pairs. For example, during a Year 8 history lesson on 'what is Britishness?' students researched evidence together at table groups and shared their ideas with each other. As a result they made good progress in their analytical skills and developed a strong understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural contributions and influences made through immigration and emigration.

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. Learning is good in the large majority of lessons and students have positive and mutually respectful relationships with their teachers. This is supported by their good behaviour. As a result, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average and students make good progress overall during their time at the school. Overall progress in English during the past three years and in mathematics in 2010 was outstanding. The school's current tracking data and evidence seen in lessons during the inspection indicate that students are on course to continue the upward trend of attainment in the 2011 examinations. Middle ability boys are progressing at a faster pace and a higher proportion of more-able students are now making accelerated progress to achieve top grades. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or learning difficulties, those for whom English is an additional language and the very few non-White British students achieve at least as well as their peers as they receive well-planned, personalised support to aid their learning.

During their time at school, students' personal qualities, such as teamwork and leadership skills, are well developed. With their good grasp of literacy, numeracy and excellent information and communication technology (ICT) skills, combined with their aspirations and determination to succeed, students are well prepared for future studies, work and their economic well-being.

Students make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities by, for example, their contribution to the new sixth form building design as a sustainable eco-friendly structure and Year 11 students acting as 'befrienders' to younger students.

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

Students enjoy recording and uploading GCSE revision podcasts for the benefit of students across the country.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

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?

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and skilfully use a range of creative resources, including ICT, to capture students' imaginations and structure active learning. In the best lessons, which account for the large majority seen, teachers plan for the learning needs of all students, set a good pace and regularly assess how well students are learning. Occasionally, however, marking does not give students enough of a steer towards making improvements and sometimes teachers miss opportunities to provide a sufficient range of learning activities appropriate for the full range of students' abilities. As a result, students' learning and progress are slower than in the more successful lessons.

The recently extended curriculum offers excellent opportunities for learning and experiences that contribute considerably to students' personal development and well-being. Through collaboration with a range of partners the Key Stage 4 `Pathways' curriculum offers a wide variety of academic and vocational options that meet the needs and interests of all students, including `fast track' options for the more able. These developments, together with the Key Stage 3 `learning to learn' programme and the targeted support groups, are playing a major role in improving outcomes for all students, including accelerating the progress being made by middle ability boys and more-able

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

students. The specialist science status, five annual enrichment days plus a range of regular enrichment activities, for example in sport, performing arts and educational visits, help students to put their learning into context and make a strong contribution to their good learning, progress and personal development.

The outstanding care, guidance and support that the students receive underpin the very positive atmosphere within the school. Strong links with families, partnerships with agencies, and the introduction of vertical tutor grouping supported by senior staff ensure that students are known to all as individuals and appropriate support is forthcoming in a timely fashion. As a result, attainment is rising, behaviour is good and attendance is high. The Jan Charman Centre (JCC) and Learning Support Department effectively support those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and other special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff work hard to reintegrate these students as quickly and effectively as possible back into mainstream classrooms. For those students who struggle to modify their behaviour in mainstream classes appropriately, alternative courses such as the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) qualification are provided. Consequently, all students are included, the proportion of exclusions has dramatically declined and all students are able to make good progress in their learning and personal development.

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?

The school benefits from the inspirational leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff. Along with governors, leaders communicate a shared vision that is ambitiously focused on raising standards and opportunities for all. Staff feel valued and morale is high. As one teacher said, 'Staff and students benefit from a culture of strong leadership and a vision of student-centred, 21st century learning which is shared by all stakeholders. It is an exciting and dynamic place to work.'

A key driver in raising standards has been the focus on the professional development of teachers, through the innovative appointment of an 'Excellent Teacher' who supports colleagues, and the various research and training groups led by a group of middle leaders. The regular student progress meetings held with senior leaders and heads of department, and the resulting plans to remedy identified weaknesses, ensure that underachieving students are spotted quickly and that teachers are accountable for the good progress of all. Leaders are increasingly effective at monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, but there is still more to do to iron out the residual pockets of less effective teaching.

The school has extremely strong partnerships with a wide range of local schools, colleges, businesses, universities, training institutions and the community. The contribution the

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

school makes to community cohesion is good. This school is a harmonious community and discrimination is not tolerated. There is a programme of curriculum-based activities to enrich students' understanding of community and diversity including overseas visits to Germany, France and the USA. Links to national schools to promote students' understanding of the diversity of religious, ethnic and cultural groups in the United Kingdom however, is at an earlier stage of development.

To avoid discrimination, students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have equal opportunities to participate in activities where possible; thus, for instance, students, whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are targeted and supported by the school and are encouraged to participate in activities that will best contribute to their personal development and progress in their studies.

The governing body meets its statutory duties well. Procedures for safeguarding students are robust and reviewed regularly. There are very effective measures in place to check and vet staff before they are appointed. Staff are also well trained in child protection procedures. Governors bring a wide range of expertise, are highly supportive and effectively call leaders to account for the quality of all aspects of the school's performance. They are currently considering how best to monitor the work of the school more directly.

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	2
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	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The return rate of the Ofsted questionnaire was above average. Almost all of the parents and carers who responded were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They were particularly positive about how their children enjoyed school, the school's due regard for their children's safety and the good progress that their children make. Inspection evidence confirmed this. A few parents and carers raised concerns about the management of behaviour, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and a very small minority felt that the school

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

could do more to help them support their children's learning. Inspectors found that during the inspection pupils' behaviour was good and well managed by staff, health was well promoted, particularly through a range of sporting opportunities, and much information is available to parents through a range of media to help them support their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Cooper 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 194 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 981 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	33	119	61	8	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	61	31	126	65	5	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	60	31	125	64	8	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	74	38	109	56	10	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	52	27	130	67	5	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	36	19	124	64	25	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	13	136	70	24	12	3	2
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)	48	25	119	61	8	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	64	33	111	57	11	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	22	110	57	21	11	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	16	128	66	12	6	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	72	37	112	58	4	2	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	74	38	108	56	8	4	1	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



23 May, 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cooper School, Bicester OX26 4RS

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited your school. We greatly enjoyed talking to many of you and wish we had had more time to meet all of you. Yours is an outstanding school and these are some of the reasons why.

- Your headteacher, staff and governors are passionate in wanting to help you achieve excellence in all that you do.
- The curriculum and extended opportunities which the school provides for you ensure that you have the widest possible choices that give you exceptionally good and enjoyable learning opportunities and prepare you well for the future.
- You willingly take on a broad range of responsibilities in the school and in the community.
- You have many opportunities to develop advanced skills in the use of new technologies, which supports your current learning and future opportunities.
- Most teachers prepare high quality lessons, and work with you to make your learning exciting. You confirmed that most give you helpful feedback to enable you to make good progress.
- You agreed that you feel very safe, very well cared for and supported.

Even outstanding schools have things that could be better. We have asked the school to ensure that in all lessons teachers prepare a range of activities to meet everyone's learning needs and that you always have an opportunity to follow up on your teachers' comments for improvement. Your school is also going to provide additional support and training to subject leaders so they can maintain the good quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility and improve it further.

You can contribute to these improvements by working hard and responding well to all that the teachers ask you to do.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Radomsky

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.