

Pittville School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115772
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	379143
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	704
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Sharpe
Headteacher	Richard Gilpin
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 24 lessons taught by 24 different teachers. They met with groups of staff and students as well as some parents and carers and members of the governing body. They spoke with the National Challenge adviser and headteacher of the collaborating school. They observed the school's work, and looked at the current work of students, records of monitoring and evaluation, and the governing body minutes. They received and analysed 111 parental questionnaires and 107 randomly sampled student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What is the consistency of teaching and learning at the present time, particularly in the key subjects?
- How well does the current curriculum serve the needs and future ambitions of all the school's students?
- How well are students with special educational needs and/or disabilities taught across all subjects, and what impact is support for special educational needs having on their progress?

Information about the school

Pittville School is smaller than most secondary schools. There is a lower proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds than average, and the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. A higher than average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is lower than average. Although the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than average, most of them are new arrivals to Britain and have had little previous English language experience. The school is a specialist performing arts college. The previous headteacher left in May 2010, with the current incumbent appointed permanently in December 2010 having been acting Headteacher from May. In September 2011, a formal collaborative agreement with Balcarras School was established.

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

Pittville School is providing a sound education, enabling most of its students to make at least satisfactory progress during their time in school. They achieve the broadly average academic standards expected given their starting points when they arrive in school. The welcoming, polite and friendly behaviour of students is a striking feature of the day-to-day working ethos in school. They wear their uniform smartly, keep the school very tidy, and are important ambassadors for the school in the local community. Buildings are well looked after, with extensive displays of students' work, and their progress and achievement. In lessons that capture and challenge their curiosity, students work hard, enjoying the satisfaction of learning new skills and concepts. Even when teaching is not so engaging because of too much time wasted before the main activity begins, they remain well behaved and patient. Teaching overall is currently satisfactory, with a majority of lessons observed by inspectors at this visit being good or better, but still too many lessons start with the same task aimed at all abilities of students. Lesson plans assume more-able students will get further through the work as it gets more difficult, and that more challenging material will be provided, but do not identify which students might be expected to attempt it. The school has a clear marking policy, but this is inconsistently applied, leaving some students with work that has not been marked, without acknowledgement of good work and no advice on how to improve it.

Students are very loyal to the school and its headteacher, and proud of the improvements they are helping to bring about. Music, dance and drama feature strongly in school life, with the majority of students involved in some form of performing arts activity supported by the school's specialism. This helps to build their confidence and communication skills, alongside an extensive range of other activities such as sports and subject revision clubs; most staff contribute to this rich extra-curricular provision. Rehearsals for a Christmas concert were in full swing during the inspection; the school was filled with music, bouncing to the rhythms of the school rock band and catalysing the smiles and good-natured banter between students, staff and inspectors. This is a very pleasant place to come and learn.

Students enjoy school and feel safe, and their parents and carers agree. Attendance has improved sharply since the previous inspection, with boys' attendance even better than that of girls. There are significantly declining and now lower-than-average numbers of serious discipline breaches. Students from all backgrounds, and of all abilities and needs, are well looked after. Recent wholesale changes to the staffing and delivery of support for students with special educational needs and/or

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disabilities have secured good care, guidance and support for such students, and are beginning to help to improve their achievement, which was previously inadequate. However, these systems are not yet fully embedded.

The new headteacher has effectively identified, evaluated the causes then tackled long-standing weaknesses in teaching and learning. He has restructured the management and staffing complement of the school to reduce the operating costs to balance with the school's income. He has cemented an effective collaboration with a local outstanding school, and most importantly has helped to instil the self-belief and confidence of students and staff that achievement can and will be improved. Attainment is improving, with notable success in mathematics. All performance measures are now starting to rise, having declined in 2010, confirming a secure capacity for further improvement.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the recent improvements to provision for students with special educational needs, particularly those at 'school action' and 'school action plus', to ensure they make at least satisfactory progress.
- Further improve the quality of teaching by spring term 2012 through:
 - ensuring activities in all lessons are matched to students' prior attainment, from the outset
 - minimising the time spent in whole-class discussion to that which demonstrates or models the required skills
 - providing sufficient time for students to complete demanding tasks, and engage in group discussion relating to those tasks.
- Expedite improvements to the consistency of written feedback to students so that they know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve their work, and provide time for them to respond to that advice.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The attainment of students when they arrive in Year 7 is below average. An increase in the number of students following vocational courses led to some overall attainment measures at Key Stage 4 rising (for example the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE equivalent grades in 2011 rose to 82%), but at a subject level, attainment in English and mathematics remained below average in 2009 and 2010, and this represented inadequate progress. In 2011, attainment in mathematics rose to average, with students making better than typically expected progress from their low starting points, and this brought attainment up closer to the

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national average. English teaching quality has also improved recently, so that students’ overall progress is now satisfactory overall. A few students with special educational needs spent most of their time at other providers and, therefore, were not experiencing the provision at Pittville. Nevertheless, in the Year 11 examination results in 2011, as before, the achievement of too many students with special educational needs was inadequate, particularly those at ‘school action’ and ‘school action plus’. New staff, qualified in special educational needs, are now effectively supporting these learners. Students who speak English as an additional language are very effectively supported, including new arrivals to the country; their progress is exceptionally high. Shortcomings in the quality of English teaching have also been addressed very well by staff changes and current inspection evidence confirms predominantly good English teaching, but this happened too late to have an impact on 2011 outcomes, which were below average in English.

In the lessons observed, students were making at least satisfactory progress, and often good learning took place; the pupils’ attitudes to learning are very positive and they thrive on opportunities for independent learning, practical investigation, group work and discussion, and in sharing their ideas with others. Most of them take part in some kind of additional activity, choosing from a wide range offered by most staff. Performing arts feature strongly in their choices but there are also popular sports and recreational clubs, a thriving fitness programme, and healthy food enjoyed by the majority of students at break and lunchtimes. Students confirm the school advises them well on personal safety when using the internet and deals effectively with bullying. Through their school parliament they have a voice in driving school improvements. For example, they can point to menu changes and the introduction of the house system as areas of influence. The proportion of school leavers not in education, employment or training has reduced from 9% in 2008 to 5% in 2011, a good improvement.

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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will	3

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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

During the inspection, all teaching was at least satisfactory, with the majority of lessons good; some were outstanding. Inspectors observed six lessons alongside senior staff and corroborated the accuracy of their own judgements. All lessons had plans to a common format, identifying outcomes at different levels, and had resources available that matched those differentiated objectives. However, in the satisfactory lessons, all students started the lower-level tasks, rather than more-able students attempting the more demanding activities at the outset. No plans referred to formal matching of tasks to particular students, even though teachers had very good information about their prior attainment. The best lessons provided interesting and academically demanding activities that fascinated students directly, using the subject content as the 'hook' to engage students. In one outstanding example, the teacher expertly demonstrated the capillary action of solvent glue on plastics, while talking about the difficult technical details in a humorous and lively way; the result was a whoop of delight by students as they saw for themselves what happens. No time was wasted in over-lengthy class discussion, or in copying generalised 'learning objectives'. Teacher input was short, dynamic, exploited the teacher's own subject knowledge to the full and enthused students to 'have a go' for themselves. In these better lessons, teachers and support staff continually circulated through the class, checking understanding and asking open questions to provoke debate and discussion at an individual level. In response, students asked their own questions, inquisitive to find out more about the task and to extend their learning beyond the planned confines of the original learning objective. In less-effective lessons, insufficient time was provided for students to complete demanding tasks, and engage in group discussion relating to those tasks

The curriculum is currently satisfactory, with a good programme of extra-curricular activities that extend and develop students' interests and talents, particularly in performing arts, and in their community engagement. However, too many students at Key Stage 4 have been following vocational courses that, although bringing increasing success in terms of the proportion gaining GCSE equivalent passes at Grade C, have not been useful enough in preparing students for further study at A level, particularly in science. That has now been addressed. More teaching time for English is being provided, and there is a good focus on work-related learning programmes that include effective links with local business partners.

Improvements in attendance, behaviour, punctuality and the good learning ethos of the school are a credit to the hard, consistent work of staff in applying the school's behaviour policy. Students appreciate this consistency and say they are treated fairly. They know and trust their teachers to do their best to support their learning. In most

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cases they are confident of individual help in lessons if they want it. Good external support for recently arrived students who speak English as an additional language is effective in helping them settle and adapt to a new country, and make good progress. External agencies have helped in tackling persistent absence concerns. For example, the attendance of students in the care of the local authority has improved to 98%. They are well supported as they move from primary to secondary school, then nurtured by an effective tutor system that is alert for any concerns. Students get good advice on future choices beyond school.

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 current headteacher has served several years as the deputy headteacher, and knows his staff and students exceptionally well. He leads by example, committing every ounce of energy into the school, and showing by example what he expects. His positive and high expectations of what students can achieve, accurate self-evaluation, and rigorous insistence that good teaching is necessary for these students to succeed have resulted in swift and effective changes to provision. He inherited a very large financial deficit, but has worked effectively with the current bursar to set a budget that is not only balanced now, but has some capacity to recover the deficit. This does mean that revenue aimed at current students is, in part, being used to pay back previous overspend. Governors have become increasingly aware of the school's performance over time, including serious weakness in student achievement in the past.

Statutory policies, including those for safeguarding, health and safety, and equality of opportunity, are in place. The provision for ensuring students' and staff safety is good and carefully monitored. The school has now resolved inequalities in provision for some students with special educational needs, and monitors the performance of all groups of learners, intervening if gaps in outcomes appear, so that its effectiveness in promoting equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Partnerships with parents and carers, outside agencies and other providers are all good and play an important role in securing school improvements, for example in attendance and in teaching and learning. The school understands its local context well and effectively uses its performing arts specialism to raise its community profile. It has not systematically analysed how it might contribute to local community needs, but the good example it sets within its own walls contributes to a satisfactory promotion of community cohesion overall. Recent joint school professional development with

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Balcarras School has helped secure teacher confidence and a recognition that the collaboration is mutually beneficial.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents and carers in the survey expressed satisfaction with the school’s work, and many wrote in detail of particular aspects that they appreciated. These included good arrangements for transition from primary to secondary school, events and activities for students and the local community, and good school-to-home communication. One wrote that the school is a, ‘happy, homely and friendly environment, making for an enjoyable experience every day’. There were very few dissenting voices, referring to concerns over late changes to sports fixtures, limited Key Stage 4 options and one issue relating to poor behaviour outside of school; the latter view was not endorsed by the many letters of congratulations for good behaviour from the public in the local community.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pittville 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 111 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 704 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	41	61	55	4	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	57	51	52	47	0	0	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	65	59	44	40	1	1	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	48	54	49	4	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	48	43	58	52	3	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	35	32	63	57	4	4	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	30	67	60	4	4	2	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)	46	41	54	49	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	43	39	62	56	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	46	50	45	4	4	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	33	63	57	2	2	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	57	51	48	43	5	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	65	59	41	37	4	4	0	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



9 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Pittville School, Cheltenham, GL52 3JD

Thank you for your polite and friendly welcome to my inspection team and me during our recent visit to your school. We were all very impressed by your kind and considerate good behaviour, and agree with you that the school is a pleasant place to learn and provides you with a satisfactory quality of education. There have been several changes in school leadership recently, and we agree with your view that there have been substantial improvements to the school's work. As a result, we saw students making satisfactory progress in all the classes we visited, and this is building upon sound results from the previous Year 11 in 2011. We also note your attendance has improved substantially, that almost all of you and your parents and carers believe correctly that the school keeps you safe, and in particular provides you with good care, guidance and support, even before you start in Year 7.

We think you are right to be proud of your school, and your efforts in continuing to promote the school to your local community are commendable and well received. There are still more changes planned, including a curriculum that will give you more choices at age 16 and partnership arrangements with Balcarras that will give both schools more opportunities to further develop. The school accurately knows its strengths and weaknesses, and we have highlighted the following areas for improvement as a priority.

- Make sure students with special educational needs, especially those at 'school action' and 'school action plus', make at least satisfactory progress.
- Further improve teaching by:
 - ensuring you are given activities that match your abilities in all lessons
 - limiting the time that teachers talk to the whole class
 - giving you time to discuss and complete suitably demanding tasks.
- Ensure teachers consistently mark your work so you know how well you are doing, how to improve, and give you time in lessons to respond to feedback.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

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