

Pittville School

Albert Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 3JD

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not yet good because

- Students' attainment is similar to the national average. English and mathematics attainment remains a little below average. Progress has started to accelerate in the last year and in mathematics it was above average in 2013. However, recent improvements have not yet raised achievement above average levels.
- The gap between the progress of students receiving additional government funding as the pupil premium and others is similar to the national average and closed a little in 2013.
- Leaders and managers are making numerous reforms to improve the school but these are not yet fully apparent in improved achievement. Plans for the future are convincing but need to be more tightly focused.
- The governing body has developed a firm grasp of the school. However, members do not check up on whether the spending of additional pupil premium funds provides good value for money.
- There have been improvements in teaching but it is still too inconsistent. There is good practice but, in too many lessons, students are not sufficiently challenged and teachers do not provide them with enough opportunities to work independently.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, with the strong support of senior managers and governors, has instituted wide-reaching changes that have set higher expectations and have started to improve the school, raising achievement and improving teaching.
- Students enjoy school and have an appetite for learning. They are receptive to their teachers, get along well with one another and behave well. Bullying is very unusual and quickly nipped in the bud on the rare occasions when it happens.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 25 lessons taught by 23 teachers and undertook five joint observations with senior staff.
- Inspectors held discussions with students, teachers, the headteacher, senior managers, representatives of the governing body and a local authority officer.
- Inspectors examined numerous school documents, including policies, assessment information, planning documents and records of all kinds.
- The views of 25 parents were analysed through the Parent View website.

Inspection team

John Carnaghan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional Inspector
Steven Colledge	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for looked-after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families) is above the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and those whose first language is not English is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is slightly above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school has a higher than usual turnover of students.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its students (lessons that take place regularly away from school).
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement to good by ensuring a higher proportion of teaching is good or better, through:
 - planning lessons to take full account of assessment information, so they offer the correct degree of challenge and support to all groups of students
 - providing more opportunities for students to work independently rather than listening passively to their teachers
 - improving the questioning of students to provide them with greater opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- Build on the school's various initiatives to continue the improvements in students' attendance.
- Develop plans for the future so that they provide simpler, measurable goals that are tightly focused on key priorities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' attainment at the end of Year 11 is broadly similar to the national average when measured across all subjects; it is a little below average in English and mathematics. There is a generally improving picture with steadily rising attainment over the last three years. The school has successfully tackled previously low attainment in science, French and religious education.
- The rate of students' progress is rising but still requires improvement. Progress in English last year rose but the proportions achieving expected progress and exceeding it remained broadly similar to national averages. In mathematics, the rise was more dramatic and progress in both aspects was good. Last year, the school focused particularly on ensuring the most able students were suitably challenged and, in consequence, the proportion of students gaining the higher A* and A grades rose considerably.
- Students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs benefit from effective support; the school uses its plentiful assessment information to identify these students and adjust what they are offered. Additional help in small groups or on an individual basis is usually effective. In this way, the needs of this group are met and they make similar progress to their peers. The school provides equality of opportunity and ensures there is no discrimination.
- The group of students involved in the Year 7 catch-up programme benefits from extra help in numeracy and, particularly, literacy. This intensive programme results in a burst of rapid progress for the majority of the targeted students, enabling them to participate fully in their Key Stage 3 studies. Students involved in early entry to the mathematics GCSE examination largely achieve well and have good opportunities to broaden their understanding of mathematics in Year 11 by pursuing relevant additional qualifications.
- There remains a gap in attainment between students supported by additional pupil premium funding and others. In English, at the end of Year 11, students are a year behind their peers; in mathematics, a little more than this. However, over the last three years, an increasing number of these students are making and exceeding expected progress and the achievement gap between them and their peers in both English and mathematics is closing. Similar improvements are evident in other year groups because expenditure has been well targeted to meet these students' specific needs.
- Progress in lessons has some inconsistencies but most lessons promote good learning. For example, a well-organised, briskly delivered and interesting Year 10 geography lesson saw students working very hard to meet their learning objectives; they were particularly well motivated because the teacher had made clear their potential GCSE levels and how to achieve them and all groups made good progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Students do not make fast enough progress largely because there are inconsistencies in teaching and too many lessons do not urgently drive learning forwards. However, the proportion of good teaching is rising because the school makes regular checks on lessons and acts on concerns, promoting best practice.
- Teachers usually plan lessons in a standard format. This ensures a reasonable conformity of practice but does not always offer students the correct degree of challenge. In most classes, two levels of challenge are the norm. Students opt for the work they believe suits them best and teachers try to keep an eye on them to ensure they are working at the correct level.
- In practice, students do not always choose the most suitable level to work at, so tend to be inadequately challenged in too many lessons. Two levels of choice are often insufficient when classes have students with a wide range of aptitudes. All too often students' work fails to keep them working at full stretch.
- The conformity of lesson planning means that there are only limited opportunities for students to

work independently. In some instances, teachers talk for too long and in many lessons there are few chances for students to work in groups, to undertake investigations or to discuss matters in pairs. While teachers' initial inputs are often brisk and purposeful, the tasks they set for students tend to lack tight deadlines so the pace of learning often diminishes in the second half of lessons.

- Teachers question students throughout lessons to check their understanding. However, their questioning is often too simple, encouraging only the briefest of answers. Because of this, there are not enough opportunities for students to think creatively about their work or reflect in depth about the topic under consideration.
- Teachers mark work regularly and well. They offer analytical and helpful comments and students say they appreciate knowing the level of their work and how to improve it. Teachers display good subject knowledge, especially in coaching students how to reach the highest grades in their examinations.
- Classrooms are notable for a calm atmosphere and good behaviour. Students are polite, hard-working and are usually good listeners. Teachers foster good relationships and students appreciate the concern they show for their progress. Teaching assistants are usually well briefed and this helps them play a significant role in supporting learning.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

- The attitudes to learning displayed by students are good. They want to do well in school, concentrate on their studies and are prone to few distractions. Students work constructively together because they get on well with one another and their teachers.
- The school has worked successfully to improve behaviour in recent years and students are confident in the school's systems to promote a calm and cohesive community. Pastoral leaders are influential in promoting positive attitudes and are well regarded by students. Exclusions have fallen in the last three years.
- Students show good awareness of the various types of bullying, such as through texting. They report that incidents are very rare in this harmonious place and are confident that, if it should occur, it would be rigorously dealt with.
- Personal, social and health education sessions ensure that students have a good grasp of how to stay safe in their daily lives. They are well aware of the potential dangers of the internet as well as how to stay safe on the busy local roads.
- Considerable efforts have been made by the school to address formerly low levels of attendance. Key appointments, such as an educational welfare officer shared with the partner school (although mainly employed in Pittville), have had a significant impact on attendance and absence rates are falling. Attendance is now close to the national average. Punctuality is good.

The leadership and management require improvement

- School leaders, particularly the headteacher, have faced significant difficulties in recent years and have worked energetically to overcome them. For example, the large budget deficit of three years ago has now been eliminated. Weaknesses in leadership and management and elsewhere have been tackled through the effective use of performance management; in consequence, there has been a higher than expected turnover of staff. The new appointments have brought numerous qualities that have considerably strengthened the leadership and management team so the school is well placed to move forwards.
- The headteacher has shown commitment and determination in addressing difficulties. Many staffing changes and more rigorous checks have promoted higher expectations among staff and students and have started to raise achievement and improve teaching. The local authority provides adequate support in addressing weaknesses. The new plans for the future being developed are convincing but need greater precision and more opportunities for the progress

made towards meeting objectives to be checked on. The school's track record of tackling concerns means it has the capacity for continuing improvement.

- Checks made on teaching are regular and systematic. The school uses its close links with a local teaching school to help coach its staff and show them examples of best practice. The school's comprehensive progress data are used to hold staff to account for the achievement of each student she or he teaches. This sharpening of practice and the good training opportunities offered to teachers to develop their skills have improved teaching. However, these developments are relatively recent and the impact on students' progress and attainment has been limited.
- The school provides three pathways of study to match students' needs; these are adjusted annually to best meet the changing needs of each group of students. The school is alert to students' needs; for example, in a Year 8 literacy week initiative, each subject delivered lessons that actively promoted literacy skills. Staff are well aware of external pressures that are changing the courses that schools offer and are well trained to keep abreast of current developments.
- A range of additional activities, including interesting educational visits, has been introduced in recent years to enrich students' experiences. These are popular and students are particularly complimentary about the sport and exercise opportunities that go beyond the usual activities to offer sports like handball and numerous dance activities. A well-planned and delivered briefing programme offers older students valuable information about educational and other opportunities available at the ages of both 16 and 18, where the expertise of a local university has been tapped to broaden students' horizons.
- Students' social and moral development is well promoted through the numerous responsibilities they hold, such as acting as leaders in the house system and working as prefects. This fosters a strong sense of community and the pupil parliament provides students with a good forum to express their own ideas, confident in the knowledge that they will be listened to and that, wherever possible, actions will be taken to address any concerns. Assemblies cover a wide range of relevant themes and offer students a chance to reflect on their lives and those of others who are more disadvantaged.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are passionate about Pittville and are proud of improvements that have been made. They receive regular training and have a good understanding of the school's attainment data and what it shows about students' progress compared with national averages. They understand the work leaders have done, using performance management to address underperformance in teaching and know about the links between teachers' performance and their pay progression. They are regularly informed about the school's plans for the distribution of pupil premium funds but do not check up on the results of the spending in enough depth, so cannot say whether it provides good value for money. Governors take their responsibilities for health and safety seriously and work with external agencies to keep up with current issues. This contributes to the school's effective safeguarding arrangements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its students' needs. This ensures that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its students' needs. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	115772
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	426863

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 students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	568
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Amanda Ford
Headteacher	Richard Gilpin
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 November 2011
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