

Dorothy Stringer School

Loder Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 6PZ

Inspection dates 4–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well. GCSE results are consistently above national averages and improving. The great majority of pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- There have been significant improvements in the provision for pupils with additional needs. As a result those pupils make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress from their starting points.
- Teaching is mostly good and sometimes outstanding. Good provision is made for teachers to continue to improve their skills.
- Pupils say they love coming to school. They behave well and feel very safe. They have a good understanding of the school's high expectations of behaviour and attitudes to others.
- The headteacher and senior leaders provide very effective leadership that has contributed substantially to the improvements brought about over the last two years.
- The well-trained and enthusiastic governing body is committed to school improvement. It provides good governance and, through careful review of all activities, ensures there is an excellent balance of challenge and support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently good or better.
- The checks made on teachers' work are not sufficiently rigorous.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 51 lessons, of which one was a joint observation with the headteacher and nine were with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors talked with pupils, looked at samples of their work, and listened to a group of Year 8 pupils read.
- Meetings were also held with teachers, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, a representative of the local authority, the headteacher, the senior leadership team, and the school’s middle leaders.
- The inspectors took account of the 216 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the 800 responses to the school’s own parent survey, and 120 questionnaires returned by school staff.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at many documents including minutes of governing body meetings, the school’s checks on how well it is doing, the school’s development plan, performance management documentation, planning documents, monitoring and assessment information, school policies, and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

John Collins, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Chris Dowsett	Additional Inspector
Clare Gillies	Additional Inspector
Jackie Jones	Additional Inspector
Una Stevens	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school and has a sports specialism.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average and almost all have good command of the English language.
- Alternative education is provided for some Years 10 and 11 pupils. There are 21 pupils attending part time at City College, and four pupils attending part time at Plumpton College.
- Approximately one in five of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium; this is a sharp increase since 2011 but remains well below the national average. Pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action and school action plus are lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is also lower than the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body have been in post for only two years. The new leaders of science, mathematics and special educational needs have been in post since September.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching still further so that all teaching is at least good by:
 - encouraging pupils to take pride in their work and insisting they present it well
 - providing sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their mathematical skills to real-life and problem-solving situations
 - ensuring all teachers' written feedback to pupils is regular, accurate and makes clear what they must do to improve.
- Improve leadership and management, particularly the quality of performance management, by:
 - being more rigorous when checking the quality of teaching
 - using records of the quality of teaching more effectively to inform the overall judgement of teachers' performance
 - reviewing early GCSE entry for modern languages to ensure that pupils achieve to their potential.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most pupils enter the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are above national averages. Their attainment by the end of Year 11 in most subjects, and including English and mathematics, is consistently above national averages. This reflects good progress from their individual starting points.
- School information and inspection evidence confirm that the current achievement of pupils in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium, has improved significantly since 2010 and is mostly at or above that expected for their ages. In particular, the proportion obtaining the highest grades in GCSE has increased significantly and the proportion obtaining five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English is well above the national average.
- School records for pupils currently eligible for the pupil premium show that the gap in achievement between these and other pupils is closing in both English and mathematics. Furthermore, by Year 11, the expected progress for these pupils in both subjects is better than national averages. When comparing the progress from their starting points, there is no significant difference between those eligible for the pupil premium and their classmates. In 2013, eligible pupils achieved an average of about one third of a grade below their classmates at GCSE but broadly in line with other eligible pupils nationally. This is because of the high-quality support they receive from subject teachers and the various intervention programmes provided by the school.
- Provision for most-able pupils is excellent and enables them to make exceptionally good progress and achieve high levels of attainment, for example, in mathematics, French and in religious education. A consequence of this is that some pupils take and achieve high grades in GCSE French in Year 9 and move on to learn Spanish in Years 10 and 11. However, a very small number of those entering do not obtain the higher grades and the criteria for early entry in modern languages should be reviewed. In mathematics and religious education high fliers take the GCE advanced supplementary (AS-level) examination in Year 11 together with GCSE in those subjects and this strategy works well for these subjects.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good in most subjects, and some of these pupils achieve more than five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This is partly because of the supportive way the school encourages its pupils to persevere and also because of the high-quality teaching and support they receive.
- The provision for pupils of all abilities to succeed in sport is outstanding and many pupils achieve well at national level as a result. Their many successes reflect the award of the school's specialist sports status.
- The small proportion of pupils studying part-time courses such as construction skills, catering, motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing at college achieve well. The school's senior staff monitor their progress at college closely; these pupils are well supported and attend regularly.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the school is typically good and the high quality of learning is underpinned by good relationships between the vast majority of teachers and pupils.
- Teaching has been a focus for improvement and the results are clear to see in the majority of lessons. As a result, the great majority of pupils clearly enjoy their lessons and make good progress.
- Outstanding lessons were seen in a wide range of subjects and in each case resulted in good or better progress made over time by pupils. For example, in a lesson for Year 11, mathematically able pupils were learning how to deal with complex problems about the forces acting on an object lying on a slope with a rough surface. Their written work showed an in-depth knowledge

and understanding of the topic well above that normally expected for their age.

- Most mathematics teaching is of good quality and enables pupils to make good or better progress. However, in a minority of lessons, especially for pupils who find the subject hard, teachers focus too much on the need to remember routines with insufficient questioning of pupils, to probe their understanding, or linking to real-life applications. This restricts pupils' enjoyment of, and progress in, the subject.
- In English, teaching has adjusted to new requirements and pupils are achieving at levels appropriate to their capability; the most-able pupils achieve very well as a direct result of high-quality teaching in which expectations are high and learning is at a challenging pace. This is reflected in their much improved GCSE results in 2013.
- Some lessons, such as a Year 7 drama lesson in which pupils discussed the key features of successful improvisation, and a Year 9 English lesson in which pupils taught each other the key features of a poem using appropriate technical language, provided excellent pace and challenge to all pupils. In each case, feedback from the teacher enabled them to make outstanding progress.
- A small minority of teachers do not provide written feedback that is regular, accurate and helps pupils to improve.
- All teachers are aware of the importance of ensuring that pupils eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do not fall behind. They plan lessons to ensure good progress and their efforts in this respect have resulted in narrowing the gap between them and other pupils.
- The school provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in many ways, for example through assemblies, encouraging pupils to work together in lessons, and through teaching about the school's values.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils say they are proud of their school and love coming to it. They say they feel safe and happy in school and if they have a problem, they know whom to turn to for help and guidance. Consequently their attendance is good and exclusions are well below national averages.
- Almost all pupils are punctual to lessons and show very positive attitudes to learning.
- Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is often remarkably good. For example, on a rainy day at lunchtime during the inspection, pupils could be seen in all corridors chatting quietly among themselves, often sitting on the floor while eating sandwiches because there is insufficient room in the dining area to accommodate them.
- Inspectors observed many examples of kind and helpful behaviour and were impressed by the courtesy and help extended to them by pupils of all ages. They contribute to various charities and respond quickly to help others in distress such as with the Philippines disaster.
- Pupils appreciate the many and varied displays that adorn walls in classrooms and corridors. These provide good opportunities for independent learning. For example, two pupils were seen during a 'wet break' pointing at the large map of the world, near the school library, discussing places they had visited and countries they would like to visit.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying. They say the school makes them very aware of the hurtful nature of racist or homophobic language and strives hard to ensure all have equal opportunities to learn in a happy, secure environment.
- Behaviour and safety are not yet outstanding because in a very few lessons, where teaching did not engage the pupils, there was low-level disruption by a few pupils.

The leadership and management are good

- In a relatively short period of time the headteacher has established himself as a caring but strong and effective leader; he is ably assisted in this role by a highly competent senior team. As

a result staff know what is to be achieved and their part in it. They are highly committed, conscientious, and continually seeking ways to build on the school's success. Improvements in the teaching, and rising achievement, show that the school can improve further.

- Communication at all levels is good and almost all staff are very positive about the importance of their role in 'developing pupils minds for a changing world' – the title of the school's strategic plan. Teachers as well as leaders at all levels influence decision-making and take an active part in improvement activities; pupils' views are also taken into account. The great majority of subject leaders in particular are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed to improvement in the areas they lead.
- The school's own checks on its strengths and weaknesses are mostly accurate though in some areas are overgenerous. For example, performance management is not sufficiently rigorous and is sometimes not sufficiently linked to the quality of teaching. However, plans for improvement are correctly focused on improving teaching, attendance and pupils' achievement.
- Teaching and learning are generally very well managed and teachers are provided with a rich programme of professional development. School records and inspection evidence show teaching and learning have improved significantly as a result.
- The school's sustained academic success has led to light-touch support from the local authority.
- The school meets the requirements of the National Curriculum in offering the required wide range of well-planned learning activities, particularly sport, which motivates the pupils and helps them to develop well, academically and personally.
- However, the school has yet to extend the number of pathways through which pupils can develop their careers, for example by increasing the availability of suitable vocational courses.
- There is a very wide range of after-school activities for further enriching pupils' experiences.
- Almost all staff (using the questionnaire) and parents and carers, using the online questionnaire (Parent View), say the school is well led and managed.

■ **The governance of the school:**

– Governance is good; it is both transparent and accountable. The well-trained, incisive and very conscientious governors make effective use of the 'data dashboard' and national information; they understand well how pupils are doing compared with national averages. They take part in checks of the school's performance, visit lessons and events, and monitor the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and safeguarding on a frequent basis. However, although the school has taken measures to ensure the security of pupils, governors are rightly in consultation with the local authority about the open nature of the site. They have very good knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this to hold the school to account. This enables them to take a significant role in school improvement planning and in policy making. Their awareness of the need to improve progress for the pupils that are eligible for pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs led to the allocation of funds to provide small-group and one-to-one tuition for those pupils and to fund a successful summer school for new entrants to Year 7 catch up. As a result, their progress is close to that of their peers. Governors are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching, and are very much involved in decisions about teachers' status and pay; they use safe recruitment procedures and do not permit unjustified promotion or salary increases. They ensure that all statutory requirements are met, and have good capacity to assist the school with further improvements.

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 pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils 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 pupils' needs. Pupils 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 pupils 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	1156478
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	424596

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	1,636
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Derek Swindells
Headteacher	Richard Bradford
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 Dec 2009
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