



Cotham School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109289
LEA Bristol, City of
Inspection number 278172
Inspection dates 5 October 2005 to 6 October 2005
Reporting inspector Nick Green HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Cotham Lawn Road
School category	Community		Cotham
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Bristol BS6 6DT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0117 9082200
Number on roll	1265	Fax number	0117 9082209
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms Beverley Charles
Date of previous inspection	18 October 1999	Headteacher	Mr Malcolm Willis

Age group 11 to 19	Inspection dates 5 October 2005 - 6 October 2005	Inspection number 278172
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Cotham School is a large, oversubscribed, comprehensive school. It has Performing Arts Specialist College status and is an Artsmark Gold school. The school is widely recognised for the range of experience it offers pupils in the arts. It takes pupils from a mainly prosperous part of Bristol, although the area is socially and economically diverse.

Most pupils come from a White British background but the proportion of pupils of a minority ethnic origin is above average. Only a few of these speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLD) is in line with the national average and, of these, 12 have statements of special educational needs. The majority of pupils have above average attainment on entry to the school and there are high numbers of gifted and talented pupils in all year groups.

A new headteacher was appointed to the school at the beginning of the term of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school judges its overall effectiveness as satisfactory; a view shared by the inspectors. Whilst the standards reached by pupils are good, their achievement is satisfactory as they do not make as much progress as they should by the end of Year 11. However, the achievement and standards of students in the sixth form are good.

In many respects, the school is successful, for example in promoting pupils' personal development and well-being and in the care, support and guidance it provides. The great majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and feel it provides a safe environment in which to learn. They participate in a variety of stimulating activities in music, dance and drama, supported by a range of artists in residence. However, the school strives hard to engage and motivate a minority of disaffected pupils and it works closely with a variety of agencies to promote pupils' well-being and support the most challenging pupils. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. The school's curriculum meets most pupils' needs. However, it is not fully appropriate for all groups, such as those with learning difficulties and those who would prefer a more work-related education. The new headteacher is providing a clear sense of direction that is focused on raising achievement. He is supported in this by an effective leadership team who share his sense of purpose and have promoted it effectively throughout the school. The comprehensive self-evaluation produced by the senior leaders accurately identifies the school's strengths and areas for development.

The school has a clear capacity to improve and knows where it needs to focus its energies. The issues raised in the last inspection report have been addressed well. Statutory requirements are now met in design and technology, pupils' individual education plans are used more effectively to support the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and the consistency of marking has improved. The school manages its resources generally well and provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form as good: a view shared by the inspectors. Students attain high standards, their progress is good and they achieve well. They are supported effectively and the strengthened tutorial system has reduced the numbers who leave before completing their studies. Students are encouraged to ask searching questions in lessons and they demonstrate effective skills in working independently. Teachers help pupils well to analyse lesson topics critically. A wide range of Advanced-level subjects are offered but little provision is made for pupils wishing to study at a lower level. The leadership and management of the sixth form are effective and have ensured that measurable improvements to the quality of provision have been achieved. The sixth form has a good reputation among pupils throughout the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- make teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 more consistently challenging and develop a more effective range of teaching and learning strategies to raise the achievement of all pupils
- broaden the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to ensure it is suitable for all groups of pupils
- identify more precisely those areas of the school's performance where improvement will have the most influence on pupils' progress
- create and implement a coherent and consistent whole-school approach to engaging and motivating the small minority of disaffected pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils' standards are above average. By the end of Year 9, they are well above average, with particularly good progress in mathematics and generally satisfactory progress in science. In 2004, pupils performed less well in Key Stage 3 tests in English, but the results in 2005 have improved. Overall, pupils learn well and make significant gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding.

By the end of Year 11, the standards reached by pupils are above average. However, over the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more grades A* to C in GCSE examinations has declined, and there was a weak performance in mathematics in 2004, although the results improved in 2005. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4, benefiting from the opportunity to opt for the subjects they wish to continue.

Achievement and standards of students in the sixth form are good. They make significant progress, pass rates are high and the percentage of higher grades they gain is well above the national average and improving. Students make better progress than expected based on their previous attainment. Most pupils make satisfactory progress overall; this is good in their first three years in the school and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The emphasis the school places on the performing arts has had a positive impact on results in both in music and drama. However, the school recognises that the progress of a minority of pupils in both key stages is not good enough. This applies particularly to some groups of minority ethnic pupils and those who have learning difficulties, because their particular needs are not addressed thoroughly. Challenging targets have now been set for all the pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils and students enjoy coming to school. Their attendance and punctuality to lessons are good. They generally conduct themselves safely in classrooms and around the school and say that they understand the safe practices promoted by their teachers. An appropriate climate for learning is evident in lessons. Pupils, and particularly the sixth form, speak highly of the school and show an appreciation of the quality of

teaching and how they are helped to achieve. They recognise the efforts the senior leaders are making to create a calm and purposeful ethos and to address aspects of school life that worry them, such as bullying which has reduced in the last two terms. Inspectors found that pupils were generally considerate and engaging young people.

There are good opportunities for sixth form students to take responsibility through involvement in activities with younger pupils, and for all pupils to participate through representation on the school council. They are aware of the positive way they are developing and maturing in preparation for life after school. The school's wide range of extra-curricular activities, learning programmes and special events reflects the importance placed on personal and social education.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school actively celebrates its multicultural composition to promote understanding and friendship between students with different home backgrounds. Pupils adopt a healthy lifestyle by participating in sport and through eating the healthy food provided in the school canteen. The school has received a Healthy Schools award. Pupils make a positive contribution to both the local and wider community through performances and charity events.

A number of subjects include learning about economic enterprise which enables pupils to develop satisfactory skills that contribute to their economic well-being. However, pupils' experience of work-related learning is limited overall.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching varies in quality. It is good in the sixth form and satisfactory overall. Teachers plan and prepare thoroughly for their lessons. They generally share lesson objectives well with pupils, which gives them a clear understanding of what they are expected to achieve. The pace of learning is often brisk and teachers mostly provide effective explanations, give clear instructions and present proficient practical demonstrations. They have good knowledge of their subjects and use questioning well to check pupils' understanding. Pupils' behaviour is managed effectively to create a productive atmosphere for learning. However, in some lessons there is a lack of structure, pupils are not engaged actively enough in their work and the variety of teaching strategies used by teachers is limited. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 are not consistently challenged to work as hard as they are able to.

Marking is carried out regularly and most subject departments use effective systems that provide good feedback to pupils on their attainment and progress. The targets set for all pupils are based on an analysis of their prior attainment, and helpful periodic reviews are held on their progress. However, assessment data has yet to be used fully to help raise pupils' achievement, particularly for those with learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

At Key Stage 3, there is a suitable curriculum for both boys and girls. At Key Stage 4, the school offers a satisfactory curriculum that meets most of the pupils' needs. However, it is not fully appropriate for those with learning difficulties or for other groups of pupils, particularly those who would prefer a more work-related education. The school has begun to address this by introducing new courses, such as health and social care, and pupils who do not continue with a modern foreign language can take a course in key skills or travel and tourism. The school is currently reviewing the Key Stage 4 curriculum as it is aware of the need to broaden it and to increase what it offers pupils to prepare them better for their future economic well-being. In Years 12 and 13, a wide range of Advanced-level subjects is offered but little provision is made for pupils wishing to study at a lower level.

The variety of activities the school provides for pupils enriches the curriculum considerably and contributes much to their enjoyment and achievement. At the end of the school day, there is a strong take-up of performing arts and sporting activities and numerous clubs, catering for interests from photography to philosophy. A range of school trips and links with schools abroad supports work in several subjects. There are also some innovative approaches to the curriculum, such as teaching scientific and mathematic principles through dance. The school orchestra, choirs, bands and various projects make a positive contribution to the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are committed to providing a high level of care, guidance and support for all pupils and sixth form students. They are effective in promoting their health and safety. Child protection arrangements are robust and regularly reviewed. Bullying and racism, when they occur, are promptly tackled. Counselling support is valued by pupils, as is their access to art therapists. Any pupils at risk are identified early and arrangements made to raise their confidence and esteem. The school works closely with a variety of agencies to promote pupils' well-being and support the most challenging pupils.

Form tutors support pupils' personal development well and the school employs learning mentors effectively. Liaison between the school and parents is strong. There are parent interest groups for each year and parent support groups for black and minority ethnic groups and for the performing arts. Year 9 pupils receive helpful advice about the choice of subjects for examinations in Year 11 and a wide-ranging careers programme makes pupils aware of the educational and career options available to them post-16, although this advice could be co-ordinated more effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is led well by the new headteacher who has quickly acquired an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. He is providing a clear sense of direction that is focused on raising achievement, improving teaching and learning and promoting the importance of success for all pupils. The senior leadership team similarly share this sense of purpose and are effective in promoting it amongst managers and staff. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and middle managers are generally effective although not uniformly so. The quality and effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation has improved over the last few terms. It takes good account of the views of pupils, staff and parents and has clearly identified key priorities for improvement.

In the past, the school's performance has not been monitored or evaluated as well as it should have been in the light of the value it adds to pupils' achievements. The establishment of more rigorous reviews of curriculum areas and year groups and greater accountability of the teachers who manage them have begun to improve this. The monitoring of the quality of teaching has also been strengthened. However, senior managers have not yet precisely identified those areas for improvement that will most influence pupils' progress.

The school's leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and the personal development and well-being of all pupils. However, they have yet to create a coherent and consistent whole-school approach to engaging and motivating a small minority of disaffected pupils.

The governing body is able, committed and supportive of the school and is aware of the need to improve pupils' achievement. It monitors the school's progress well and makes a significant contribution to development and improvement planning. Governors are increasingly holding the leaders and managers to account for the school's performance. The majority of parents are supportive of the school and feel they are consulted. However, a small minority judge that behaviour in the school is not good.

The growing strength of leadership and management and the effectiveness of the improvements already introduced provide the school with a good capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Cotham School Cotham Lawn Road Cotham Bristol BS6 6DT

7 October 2005

Dear Pupils,

We would like to thank you for your contributions to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and we learned a great deal from our discussions with many of you in lessons and around the school.

You are rightly proud of the reputation the school has in the performing arts and this has a positive impact on many aspects of life at school, providing you with a variety of stimulating activities. The great majority of you say you enjoy coming to school and feel it provides a good environment in which to learn. Your teachers are concerned for your personal development and well-being and it is pleasing to see that bullying is now reducing, due to their efforts. Your new headteacher and the senior staff are leading and managing the school well, although they know that a small minority of you need more encouragement to become fully involved in what the school can offer. The school's curriculum caters well for those of you who want to study the more traditional academic subjects, although it does not provide enough choice for pupils who would prefer a more work-related education.

Overall, your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Whilst the standards reached by most pupils are good, not all make as much progress as they should by the end of Year 11. Some groups of pupils, including those who find learning difficult, do not have their particular needs addressed thoroughly. However, achievement and standards in the sixth form are good. The teaching and learning we saw was satisfactory but we feel you could be set more consistently demanding work to achieve higher standards.

In order to improve, teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 needs to be more consistently challenging and the curriculum should be broadened to include more work-related courses. The school needs to identify more precisely those areas of its performance where improvement will have the most impact on your progress. It should also develop a whole-school approach to engaging and motivating the small minority of disaffected pupils. You all have a part to play in this, by participating in all the school has to offer and striving as hard as possible to raise your achievements.

We wish you the best for the future.

Nick Green HMI, Lead Inspector