



The Cavendish School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117528
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280108
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Ms. Annella Mochan LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Warners End Road
School category	Community		HP1 3DW
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 404333
Number on roll	1184	Fax number	01442 4404378
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Terry Douris
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Dr. Stephen Pam

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 23 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	Inspection number 280108
------------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Cavendish School was awarded specialist status for sports in 2002. With 1184 students on roll, including 194 in the sixth form, it is of average size. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is below average. However, the proportion who have learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Although the school is fully staffed it suffers from difficulties in recruiting permanent teachers in many subjects. The school's stated purpose is to provide an excellent education so that each Cavendish student will realise their full potential.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The school is not fully effective but in many respects it is providing an acceptable standard of education and it provides satisfactory value for money. Most students enjoy their education and attendance is generally good. The strong leadership provided by the headteacher and senior managers has resulted in a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising the achievements of students. After the last inspection, examination results declined but have subsequently improved in 2005. The school has shown it has the capacity to improve. It has accurately identified the areas it needs to improve and is taking appropriate action to remedy weaknesses. The parent questionnaire used as part of the inspection produced mostly strong support for the school. Achievement and standards are inadequate overall. At all key stages, students make less progress over time than they ought. Girls' achievement is better than boys'. However, as a result of effective procedures to monitor and improve teaching, the majority of students are now making at least satisfactory progress in lessons. Inspectors confirmed the school's view that its teaching is satisfactory. Nevertheless, the teaching does not always meet the differing needs of students and there is insufficient challenge to extend students' learning. The best practice provides well for the students but it is not sufficiently widespread. The setting of homework is inconsistent and the quality of marking varies unacceptably. Staff know the students well and provide them with a good level of individual support. Those who have learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported. The students' personal development is given a high priority. The procedures for setting individual targets and for reviewing progress are good but the impact on standards and achievement has not yet been fully realised. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school's sports college status increases the opportunities available to all students to participate in sport for leisure or to gain an accredited qualification. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the students' achievement. The school also requires significant improvement in relation to its sixth form.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The effectiveness of the sixth form is judged to be inadequate. There has been a decline in the number of students achieving pass grades. Students do not make the progress expected of them. The sixth form centre facilities are poor and offer limited opportunities for private study and the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The quality of teaching and learning is improving with an increased focus on consolidating learning. Collaboration with the West Dacorum Partnership for Learning is contributing to a wider choice of subjects. A new head of sixth form has been appointed but it is too early to judge the impact of recently introduced initiatives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards in all areas of underperformance. - Raise the quality and improve the consistency of teaching to that of the best. - Ensure that homework is set and marked regularly to bring about improvements in students' performance. - Embed the new systems for student progress reviews and target setting to enable students to achieve their full potential.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate and the students have not made as much progress over time as they should. However, in most lessons observed during the inspection the students made at least satisfactory progress. Throughout the school girls make better progress than boys. When students enter the school in Year 7, their standards are close to the national average. National and school data show that in recent years, students have made unsatisfactory progress through Key Stage 3. Progress is below what might be expected in all the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Standards achieved in English are below those in mathematics and science. However, a rise in 2005 has brought standards broadly into line with national averages. At Key Stage 4, the students' overall progress from their entry points in Year 10 was lower in 2004 than 2003 mainly due to the poor performance of boys, particularly in the core subjects. The attainment of girls was better than boys but remained below average. The proportion of students achieving five or more grades A* to C in GCSE examinations fell in 2004, but there was a rise in 2005 due to the efforts made by the school to lift performance at this level. The improvement was not consistent across all subjects. Students studying GCSE art, design and technology, drama, geography, history, and physical education (PE) achieved well relative to other subjects in the school. Mathematics, science, humanities and business studies performed less well. Achievement in the sixth form is inadequate. The students' progress in 2002 and 2003 was broadly in line with expectations but declined in 2004. In 2005, there was improvement in the average point score but it remains below the national average. The improvement was inconsistent across subjects and represents inadequate progress for many students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development of students is satisfactory. Most enjoy being at school and attend regularly. The school has good systems for monitoring and improving attendance, although there is some concern over the attendance of the current Year 11 students. The previous high rate of exclusions has been reduced, partly through the 'Learning Support Unit' and partly through the adoption of a new 'Fair Play' code of conduct devised with the help of the student council. Although most behaviour in lessons is good, students report that there is still a small minority who do not follow the agreed code and whose poor behaviour occasionally disrupts the learning of others.

Students work well in the majority of lessons where staff are rigorous in applying the principles of the new code. Students appreciate the variety of lesson approaches which are now being used in many classes. Provision for students' social and moral development is satisfactory. However, there are few opportunities for the development of spirituality. There is a broad range of extracurricular activities. The extensive programme of sport enables students to develop healthy lifestyles, although the recent work on healthy eating is not yet having its full impact. There are good links with the local community, for example, students support work in local primary schools. Students, particularly in the sixth form, are developing the skills necessary so that they can contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Relationships between staff and students are good, and behaviour in lessons is rarely less than good. However, there are inconsistencies in teaching, and the school has yet to completely fulfil its aim of eradicating some inadequate practice. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. In good lessons, students are actively engaged by challenging and interesting teaching. Probing questions and the active involvement of students enables them to make good progress. In the sixth form, students' learning benefits from opportunities to reinforce and test what has been learnt. Students who have additional needs benefit from the support of teaching assistants. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers do not give students sufficient time to elaborate or develop their ideas. In many lessons, students do not consolidate their learning and evaluate what they have learnt. In the sixth form, there are inconsistencies in using topic checklists to aid revision. There is a clear policy on assessment, recording and reporting of students' progress. The assessment of students' standards and attitudes to learning is leading to more accurate setting of future targets. The quality of marking is too variable. In the best examples, teachers provide detailed feedback which gives an accurate grade and clear guidance on what students need to do to improve their work. In contrast, some marking is infrequent and superficial.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is full access for all students who have additional needs, including a programme for the gifted and talented. The school acknowledges that it needs to strengthen the ICT provision for students in Years 10 and 11. There are satisfactory academic and vocational pathways for students at age 14 onwards although staffing shortages and absences have, in recent years, adversely affected the flexibility of students' choices. The sixth form curriculum provides a good choice of courses. Students' education is broadened through their general studies programme and they are effectively prepared for higher education and employment. The school's

sports college status has successfully expanded the opportunities available to students. This is having a beneficial effect on raising their confidence and self-esteem. A high proportion of students enthusiastically participate in a good range of extracurricular activities in the arts and sport. The school is working to improve the quality of homework. Students generally welcome this but are rightly concerned about the inconsistencies between staff in regularly setting and marking their work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is satisfactory. Tutors and the heads of year know the students well. The recently introduced system for target setting shows students and parents what the student is capable of achieving and gives good guidance on what to do to reach the target. Students have confidence in the staff and know that they will be helped if they are subject to bullying or have other problems. The school meets requirements for health and safety and child protection. Students who are vulnerable or who have some other form of special need are supported well. Students receive good guidance in their choice of options for Year 10. Guidance for transition from Year 11 to the sixth form is weak and results in some students being placed on inappropriate courses. The extensive links with external agencies work well in the interests of the students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher provides strong and supportive leadership ably assisted by the senior leadership team. There is a determined sense of purpose to improve the school. The headteacher has a clear vision focused on raising standards and achievements. Senior and middle management leadership roles are well defined. The school acknowledges that some managers need further training and development. Since the appointment of the headteacher there have been improvements in the quality of teaching, student achievements, attendance, school discipline and behaviour. However, not all students are challenged sufficiently to enable them to do their best. The school has accurately identified key priorities for improvement through its self-evaluation. There is rigorous analysis of examination data and a realistic assessment of achievements. Lesson observations are a particular strength. They are linked effectively to staff training and development. Views of parents are actively sought and most show strong support for the school. A small minority, however, consider that the school does not take sufficient account of their views and student behaviour could be improved. With the exception of the new classroom block for PE, accommodation is poor. Most of the buildings are dilapidated. Social space for students is inadequate and the canteen doubles as a gymnasium. The school has difficulty in recruiting teachers. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are well-informed about the school's performance and are very supportive of the senior leadership team. The school's finances are carefully managed. The

strengths in leadership and management have enabled the school to show it has the capacity to improve.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
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?	4	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	4
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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
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

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your co-operation and assistance during the recent inspection. We met and talked with many of you, watched your lessons and observed your progress review meetings with your tutors. We also talked to your parents and read the letters they sent to us. This letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection and explain what we think the school does well and what would make it even better. There is a very friendly atmosphere in the school. We were impressed by the mature and clear ways you expressed your views. You all get on well with each other and enjoy being at school. We found that the school does a number of things well. The headteacher, teachers and support staff are very committed and work very hard to improve your school. We think that the school provides you with a good range of courses and extra activities outside lessons. A number of you do well in your tests and examinations. However, we think that many of you are capable of doing better and could achieve higher grades. Most of you behave well but a few of you do not always follow the 'Fair Play' code which your school council helped to write. The new target setting system gives you a much clearer idea of what you need to do to improve and will help you to do better. You benefit from some good teaching but we would like to see more of this quality. We appreciate the concerns that you and your parents have about homework. We have recommended that your teachers set and mark work more regularly. We are confident that with your help the school can continue to improve. We wish you well in the future and hope you are successful in whatever you decide to do.