



The Cottlesloe School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110533
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288706
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Aylesbury Road
School category	Foundation		Wing
Age range of pupils	11–18		Leighton Buzzard LU7 0NY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01296 688264
Number on roll (school)	1105	Fax number	01296 681729
Number on roll (6th form)	136		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Mark Fuchter
		Headteacher	Mr David Stevinson (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors for two days and one additional inspector for one day.

Description of the school

The Cottesloe School, a newly designated specialist Arts College, serves pupils from a wide rural area, including parts of Bedfordshire. Almost all are of white heritage backgrounds and very few have a home language other than English. Families in the area have ready access to a range of selective and comprehensive schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is very much lower than is typical nationally. One in ten pupils, lower than national figures, has learning difficulties and disabilities. Numbers in the sixth form are increasing rapidly. The school is led by an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Cottesloe is an improving school that provides a satisfactory quality of education.

The overwhelming majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school's drive for improvement and consider it 'a welcoming place where everyone is well known'. A real strength of the school is its happy caring ethos and emphasis on nurturing positive relationships. Personal development is good. Students behave well and attend very regularly, better than at the last inspection, because they enjoy school. They are particularly keen on the rich opportunities for out-of-hours activities such as sport, drama and music. Students take responsibilities seriously and some provide exemplary service to their fellows through their work in the canteen; at break and lunch times. They are keen to stay healthy and participate well in physical activities. Effective personal and social education and personal guidance prepares students well for the future. Increasing numbers choose to remain at the school for their post-16 education.

Although detailed attention is given to ensuring that students work and spend leisure time in a safe environment, there is no shelter to protect them from inclement weather while awaiting school transport. The lack of any kitchen and indoor dining facilities is only tenable because of the good nature of the students.

The acting headteacher, effectively supported by the senior team, is managing the school well in the short period between permanent headteachers. The newly designated arts college has made a good start with the 'arts week' launch. The positive effects of senior leadership are increasingly evident in the overall upward trend in external examinations. Younger students are achieving well with test results in mathematics and science rising to just above average, a match to those of English. Overall standards at Year 11 are average with all groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, making steady progress. Standards in the expanding sixth form are now average and achievement satisfactory. Issues from the last inspection have been well addressed. The main school curriculum, for example, has improved with better opportunities for vocational courses. Governance is good. This clear evidence indicates the school's good capacity to improve further.

Despite these positive features, however, leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Aspects of the school's evaluation are too generous. The monitoring of teaching, for example, provides a higher distribution of good and better lessons than that found jointly by inspectors and the current senior team. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The robust whole-school assessment systems are less well embedded in classroom practice than senior managers estimate. Middle managers' effectiveness in monitoring learning is too variable.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Standards have risen considerably since 2005 and are now average. Students make satisfactory progress. Rigorous checks to

make sure students are on course to meet their targets show that achievement is continuing to improve.

A lack of facilities for private study means that students regularly work at home during school time. This affects both attendance and the learning ethos negatively within the sixth form. Working relationships are good. Students are articulate and communicate confidently with adults. They make valuable contributions to the running of the school and to the local community. They give particularly good support to local special schools. Students speak highly of how they are cared for and note that 'teachers are always available to help them'. However, they note that tutorial meetings do not help them enough to make progress in their work.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory as are teaching and learning. Monitoring, linked to professional development activities, are beginning to develop further teachers' understanding of how students learn best. Some students still lack strong independent learning skills and do not understand clearly how to improve work. The curriculum meets the needs of current students satisfactorily but has few vocational courses to encourage others into the sixth form. The capacity to improve further is strong because of the school's very clear understanding of the next phase of development within the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure all middle managers are effective in managing their areas
- improve the quality of day-to-day assessment and develop a shared understanding among teachers and students of what constitutes effective learning in both the main school and in the sixth form
- take more imaginative steps to manage the over-stretched accommodation and the lack of social facilities for students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are average in the main school and in the sixth form. From a broadly average base, students achieve satisfactorily by the end of Year 11. Progress is faster in Years 7 to 9 than in other year groups. This is partly because some older students are slow to develop independent learning skills. Post-16 students also make satisfactory progress given their starting points.

Test results at the end of Year 9 show a steady improvement and are just above average. All groups of students achieve well but able students make especially fast progress in English. In 2006, standards in mathematics and science improved to match those of English. There is an upward trend in the proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades despite fluctuations from year to year. In the most recent examination series, close to half of Year 11 gained Grade C or better in both English and mathematics, similar to that expected nationally. Nevertheless, students do not do equally well in all subjects. They achieve very successfully in English, drama and

art, reflecting the school's specialist status as an arts college. The school has taken robust and partially successful steps to address students' slow progress in history and design and technology. More boys than girls completed GNVQ courses in recent years. This accounts for the apparent gap in the rate of progress of boys and girls. Generally, students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to others in their year groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. Students engage very well with visitors and relationships throughout the school community are excellent. The overwhelming majority of students enjoy coming to school and attend very regularly. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good and is reflected in students' respect for the views, values and beliefs of others.

Students feel safe in school and behave very well in lessons and around the site. They show remarkable tolerance at breaks and lunchtime given the lack of social and dining facilities. Students adopt safe and healthy practices because of an effective personal, social and health education programme. They appreciate the healthy eating promoted through the exceptionally well-managed tiny school canteen. 'Helping here is exciting and I learn a lot about food preparation and nutrition' said a Year 10 student. Years 9 and 10 are keen to accept the unusual opportunities to help in the canteen and contribute to the nutritional needs of the school community. High numbers take part in sports and other activities reflecting well students commitment to fitness. Others participate fully in the school council and support the wider community through a number of charities and other events. Work experience, citizenship and the careers programmes prepare students well for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons range from outstanding to a very small minority that are inadequate. Regular monitoring of teaching identifies areas for development and provides targeted professional support. However, the focus in lesson observations concentrates too much on teaching rather than on how pupils learn.

Warm working relationships are reflected in students' confidence in their teachers and this helps them to engage well in classroom activities. Good pace, well-used praise and high expectations of work and behaviour help students to concentrate well on tasks. In a very effective Year 10 English lesson, students made rapid progress because

of probing questioning and high levels of challenge. Despite these good features, teaching does not always focus well enough on helping students become effective independent learners. Not all students are clear about what they are expected to learn or how to improve their work. Much marking is unsatisfactory and often unrelated to students' academic targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of students well. The number of vocational courses, enterprise and work-related opportunities has increased since the last inspection. Vocational courses are popular with students and offer helpful pathways into training and employment. Provision for personal, health, social and citizenship education is good and contributes very effectively to students' personal development.

Provision for literacy and numeracy across subjects is satisfactory but the development of information and communication technology skills is hindered by too few resources, partly the result of a deficit budget. Enrichment and out-of-hours learning offer a wide variety of activities. Students benefit from local and international visits and an interesting range of external visitors. Specialist arts status has not yet had time to influence major developments in the curriculum but is already making a positive contribution to individual events such as arts week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students report that problems are dealt with promptly and in a very 'understanding way'. They know who to turn to if there is a concern. Personal guidance about choices as they move through the school draws very well on outside agencies when needed. Students at risk are identified early and effective arrangements are securely in place to keep them involved in school.

The school has developed systematic whole-school procedures to check on students' progress. However, these termly assessments are not always well enough underpinned by departmental practice to assess students' learning. A new mentoring programme is underway but does not always focus sharply enough on students' academic needs and progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some aspects are good, for example, that of the acting headteacher. Through sensitive leadership, and well supported by

the senior team, he has sustained the school's drive to improve. The impact is evident in the upturn in standards and in the caring ethos for both staff and student. The school's progress as a specialist arts college is gaining momentum under an able director. Governance is good. Under the leadership of a well-informed chair, governors are closely involved in monitoring and challenging the school's work.

The sixth form is led satisfactorily although the post has not been substantially changed to reflect the growing numbers and increased responsibilities. Committed middle leaders share the senior team's clear vision for school improvement although not all understand well enough how to manage their accountabilities. The school's self-evaluation firmly rooted in regular reviews of whole-school and departmental progress. Professional development activities alongside performance targets are increasingly effective in developing the capacity of staff. Nevertheless, some evaluations of performance such as that on the quality of teaching and learning are too generous. Despite improving whole-school systems, there are still weaknesses in departmental assessment systems.

The views of parents, students and the local community are much valued and inform changes, including the timing of the school day, charity choices and consultation evenings. Many comment that they 'feel their voice matters'.

The school has a deficit budget and this restricts the resources available as well as changes to the deployment of staff. Accommodation is well maintained but the school has outgrown its present buildings. Social facilities for lunch and breaks have not improved since the previous inspection.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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?	2	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 to below 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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

After our visit to Cottesloe we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your friendly welcome. A special thanks to those of you who took time to talk to us. We are pleased that you enjoy school and the many opportunities it provides, particularly the after-school activities. We are equally pleased that you behave so well in class and around the site. You attend well, know about healthy eating and join in many physical activities. We appreciate the challenges you encounter because of the lack of sixth form accommodation, dining facilities and shelters when waiting for school buses. Many of you do amazingly well by responding to the catering challenges and helping in the tiny canteen. You gain really useful skills for later working life.

We think that your school is providing you with a sound education and that it is improving all the time. There are many things that are good about your school, not least that it is now a specialist arts college. Your sixth form has made great strides in the last few years. Your teachers are very committed to helping you and they look after you very well. Your acting headteacher is maintaining the school successfully in preparation for the new headteacher who will arrive in January. Overall standards are rising and you are making satisfactory progress.

We are convinced you will continue to support your teachers and respond actively to their attempts to help you make ever faster progress. We have asked your teachers to work on a number of things to make your school even better:

- ensure all departments are managed effectively
- improve the checks on your learning in class and in your written work
- take more imaginative steps to manage accommodation for dining and the sixth form and for shelters when waiting for school buses.

We wish you all the best for your future success.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector