



Dorothy Stringer High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114580
Local Authority Brighton and Hove
Inspection number 289981
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Stephen Long HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Loder Road
School category	Community		Brighton
Age range of pupils	11–16		BN1 6PZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01273 852222
Number on roll (school)	1611	Fax number	01273 852310
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Reg Hook
		Headteacher	Trevor Allen
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	17–18 January 2007	289981

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Dorothy Stringer School is much larger than most secondary schools. It has specialist status for sport and is the centre of a School Sports Partnership with other local primary and secondary schools. The school holds Healthy School and Sportsmark Gold Awards. It is a designated training school, offering places to trainee teachers from nearby universities. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and a lower than average proportion are entitled to free school meals. The school is a popular choice for local parents and carers. The majority of pupils are White British and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Dorothy Stringer is a good and improving school with some outstanding features. The headteacher is charismatic, committed and sets a positive tone where enjoyment of learning matters. He is well supported by the senior leadership team and other staff who, together, have brought about good improvement since the last inspection and offer good capacity to go further. Parents and carers are very supportive. As one parent said 'it is a well run school with incredibly motivated teachers and an inspirational head.' Leadership and management are good overall, setting clear direction, although not always focusing sharply enough on identifying groups of pupils who may be underachieving in order to take appropriate action. The school's specialist status makes a significant impact on standards and achievement and on sport in the community, where the school takes a leading role. Targets have been met overall and the school is in the process of re-designation.

Achievement is good and the standards reached in Year 11 have improved consistently over the last seven years. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average and they make steady progress during the first three years. Progress accelerates rapidly from then on and standards are much higher than average by the end of Year 11. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to other pupils with the exception of those in Years 10 and 11 identified as having lower levels of need. These pupils make satisfactory, rather than good, progress because support is less well targeted than for those with more significant needs.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They are well cared for, feel safe and understand the need to stay healthy. The school has a very positive ethos and pupils behave sensibly, demonstrating good attitudes to learning and very clearly enjoying their education. Relationships between the pupils themselves and with staff are a striking feature. The school is one of the first in the country to achieve the Healthy Schools Gold Award for its strategies to develop pupils' emotional well-being. Pupils make an excellent contribution to their community both inside the school and in the local area.

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding practice and the majority of lessons challenge pupils appropriately. However while the teaching has many strengths, these are more evident in older pupils' lessons. The curriculum, including enrichment through clubs and other activities, is outstanding. The school makes every effort to build the curriculum around its pupils while meeting national requirements and this greatly enhances pupils' enjoyment of learning. Specialist status is central to the curriculum, enriching opportunities for all pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- To develop the monitoring, by leaders and managers at all levels, of the achievement of groups of pupils to ensure all achieve equally well.
- To enhance support for pupils identified as having less severe learning difficulties, especially in Years 10 and 11.

- To improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 by ensuring that the best practice seen in the school is shared.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In Years 7 to 9 pupils achieve above average standards in mathematics, English and science as well as in the broader curriculum. This represents satisfactory progress based on their above average starting points. Standards in English and mathematics have been high and on a rising trend for a number of years, while science has lagged behind. However, improvements to the science curriculum mean standards have now risen and are in line with other subjects.

Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good because teaching is more consistently effective than in Years 7 to 9 and because pupils respond well to the rich curriculum. More able pupils do well. The most recent GCSE results indicated strong performance in many subjects including drama, geography, modern foreign languages and music. Pupils also perform well on work related courses and in Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) sport. Historically, achievement in GCSE science has been weaker, however as with younger pupils, progress has improved and pupils are now on target to do better. Progress has also improved in most areas of design and technology although standards in food technology remain low.

Pupils are entered early for some courses and achieve well overall. Results are good for example in GCSE French in Year 9 and in AS level Music and AS level Philosophy and Ethics in Years 10 and 11. However, results in AS level information and communication technology (ICT) have been disappointing; this course has been discontinued and an alternative established.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Moral, social, cultural and spiritual development is good and underpins the pupils' good social skills and understanding of different cultures. The personal, social and religious education programmes ensure pupils are thoughtful about contemporary moral issues.

Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about their life at school. They value the opportunities available to them. Their parents agree; in the words of one: 'Both my children really enjoy school and are proud of it.' Attendance has been below average but has improved faster than the national figure in recent years because of effective action by the school. Attendance is now average.

Pupils behave well, both in and between lessons, and show concern for each other's welfare. Bullying is rare and pupils say that any incidents are dealt with effectively. Year 7 pupils spoke positively about their transition into the school whilst older pupils said that the school prepares them well for the world of work. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy because of the good levels of support

provided. For example, a healthy options canteen has been introduced and pupils understand, although not all like, the idea of eating healthily. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community both outside and within the school, for example through their sports links with primary schools and involvement in local festivals. Innovative in-school work includes publishing a school magazine. Pupils are committed to charity work, giving generously of their time and money.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons are well paced and stimulating. They involve a good variation of tasks, enabling pupils to learn in different ways and to remain engaged. Increasingly, technologies such as interactive whiteboards are used to aid learning. Lessons are usually well structured around clear objectives so that pupils know what they are learning and why. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Their assessment of pupils' progress in lessons is often skilful, for example through questioning. These positive features are regularly evident in the teaching of older pupils, leading to better achievement. Between Years 7 and 9, the overall pace of learning is slower because lessons do not consistently challenge all pupils and insufficient homework is set to maintain the continuity of learning from one lesson to the next.

Assessment information is often used well to check pupils' progress and support the planning of lessons within many subjects. Very good practice exists in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, in physical education (PE) and in geography. However, the school acknowledges that the best practice is not universal in all subjects.

In-class support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good overall. Nevertheless, for those identified by the school as having more modest levels of need, there is insufficient support in some lessons; this results in the slower progress seen by these pupils, most notably in Years 10 and 11.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it responds flexibly to the pupils' changing needs and aspirations. Year 9 pupils have the opportunity to study for GCSE examinations and gain additional qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT). Years 10 and 11 pupils greatly appreciate the wide range of courses, including early entry to GCE AS levels and Applied GCSEs. These early entry opportunities motivate pupils well. The school monitors the curriculum carefully and adjusts what is offered where necessary; for example identifying that progression from the Year 9 ICT course requires improvement in Year 10. Well targeted vocational options enable pupils who may not benefit from full GCSE courses to find success. The monitoring of these options, some taught at other institutions, is excellent.

The curriculum fully reflects the school's specialist status. All pupils gain a GCSE or equivalent certificate in PE at the end of Year 10 and sport makes a real contribution to developing pupils' health. In addition over half the pupils complete the Junior Sports Leader Award, enhancing their personal skills through coaching activities and presentations.

Curriculum enrichment is outstanding with a vast range of well attended clubs and other activities, including with an environmental focus using the school's eco-centre. A rich tapestry of residential visits broadens pupils' educational experiences and these additional opportunities are one of the reasons why the pupils say they enjoy the school so much.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of its pupils and is committed to their health and safety. As a result, pupils feel safe and well supported. Arrangements for the vetting of staff are secure. The school works effectively with parents and outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils. They are identified early and supported effectively, for example through the Drop-In Centre. Pupils who find difficulty managing their own behaviour are helped to remain in school.

Support for pupils with learning difficulties is good overall with strengths in provision for those with more significant need. Parents of these pupils are very positive about the care they receive and in the words of one, 'My son has a statement of special educational needs and has benefited from being at Dorothy Stringer. All the teachers are very attentive to his needs and he enjoys school very much.' However, support for those with less significant learning difficulties is not always comprehensive enough or monitored well enough.

Academic guidance for pupils is good; they have a good understanding of their current levels and grades.

In most subjects they know what to do to improve because they receive useful feedback from teachers and, increasingly, evaluate their own work. However, the approach to assessment varies between subjects and this causes some confusion, especially for lower attaining pupils. The information provided about options within the curriculum and in making choices for post-16 study supports pupils well when making decisions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

An effective monitoring and evaluation cycle gives the school a good understanding of the main areas requiring improvement and of the impact of past actions. This enables clear overall direction to be set through the school improvement plan, although priorities noted in evaluative documents are not all reflected therein. Pupils' academic progress is monitored well through individual subjects and teaching is regularly observed, with good guidance given for improvement. Pupils' personal development

is also tracked carefully. However, the marrying of academic and pastoral monitoring is insufficiently coordinated and hinders the systematic identification, for example, of groups of pupils who may be underperforming in a number of subject areas so that quick action can be taken.

An active professional development programme ensures the recruitment and retention of good staff. Their talents are fostered and rewarded. The staffing structure answers the needs of the school well and has energised staff, for example by being promoted internally.

The school operates effectively on a day-to-day basis, despite large pupil numbers and inadequate accommodation in areas such as the cafeteria. Resources are effectively deployed. The school is very successful at acquiring outside sources of funding. Governors know and monitor the school well. They take an active interest in all aspects of school life. There is an open and honest relationship between the headteacher and the chair of governors, who gives unstintingly of his time.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

I am writing to thank you for your participation and help during the recent inspection of the school. Hopefully it has not been so wet and windy since we were in! This letter provides a summary of the main report which you may also want to read.

Dorothy Stringer is a good school with some areas of real strength. It has improved steadily over the last seven years in relation to your academic achievement, which is now better than in most schools. The headteacher leads the school well and is well supported by the other staff. You told us you enjoy school, that there is a good atmosphere and that you feel well cared for and safe. Parents and carers backed this view and are very pleased with the school. One of the strongest features is the curriculum available to you. Many of you told us that the school works hard to make learning interesting. You also told us you value the extra activities such as the clubs. The school's specialist status for sport was also popular, with most of you saying the sport-related activities were welcome. We think you make an outstanding contribution to school life through things like year councils and charity fund raising. You also make an outstanding contribution to the local community, for example through sports coaching in primary schools. You behave well and get on well with each other and the staff. You try to lead healthy lives by eating well and taking exercise. Most lessons are good and some are outstanding, particularly for older pupils. Most of you know what to do to improve your work although different subjects do this in different ways and this can be confusing.

Although the school is good, we have asked the headteacher and staff to work with you in the following ways so that it improves further:

- To link all the information about the progress you are making in different subjects and use it to identify pupils who may need more help.
- To make sure all of you who have learning difficulties have enough support in all lessons.
- To find ways of sharing the features of the best lessons with all teachers.

Thank you again and I wish you the very best for the future.