



The Boswells School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115332
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290209
Inspection dates 5–6 December 2006
Reporting inspector Barbara Hilton

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Burnham Road
School category	Foundation		Chelmsford
Age range of pupils	11–18		Essex CM1 6LY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01245264451
Number on roll (school)	1485	Fax number	01245350142
Number on roll (6th form)	248		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Ruth Bird
		Headteacher	Mr David Crowe
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	5–6 December 2006	290209

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Boswells School is a large secondary school with a substantial sixth form (known as The Boswells College). In 2004 the school gained specialist status in performing arts. The school is in a relatively advantaged area and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. Nearly all stay up to Year 11 and over half continue into college. Compared with most schools, few have learning difficulties and disabilities. Most students are White British. Small numbers come from several minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. The ability of students starting in Year 7 is broadly average, and a little better in some years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Boswells School is a good neighbourhood comprehensive school, and is popular. Inspectors confirm the school's own evaluation of its work. Direction by the headteacher and senior team is strong and focused on supporting individuals to achieve their aims. Development as a performing arts college has had significant impact on the quality of education provided and students' personal development. Governors work in effective partnership with the school which reviews and evaluates its provision thoroughly. Leadership and management are good. Subject and pastoral teams monitor students' progress and plan developments to help them to improve. In the last year, boys' results have risen, in response to analysis of GCSE results and focus on boys' progress. Targets based on students' earlier achievements are challenging, and have assisted teachers in raising standards, but have not been met. The use of targets and actions taken to secure them by middle managers, the heads of skill areas and heads of years, are of varying effectiveness.

Students achieve well to reach above average GCSE results, from broadly average attainment on entry. All gain at least one graded result at GCSE and the proportion achieving at least five GCSEs is high. However, the number gaining the highest grades (A*/A) is just average. Results in English at Key Stage 3 lag behind those in mathematics and science in some years.

Students are well prepared for their future lives and work. Their personal development is good, with some strengths. They greatly enjoy school and have a strong voice in its improvement. Students are well motivated, have good attitudes to learning and are proud of their achievements in school and the wider community. Attendance is above average. Behaviour is good. Students have good awareness of the importance of healthy living and of how to stay safe. Care, support and guidance are good. Pastoral support is a strength. Students are confident they have people to turn to for help. The learning support team is strong and support for the gifted and talented is developing.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned with an interesting range of activities, suitably adapted for the pace at which individuals are learning. However, the use of assessment information to plan the next steps to raise students' achievement is mixed. It is good in mathematics and science, which maintain consistently good achievement and results. In some lessons the most able are not challenged enough. The curriculum is good, providing a traditional choice of subjects, with an applied pathway in Key Stage 4. The range of extra activities is very good and enhanced through performing arts status and international links. Home learning tasks, graded by difficulty and accessed on the school's web-site for students in Years 7 to 9, are a considerable boost to students' independent learning.

Overall the school provides good value for money. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

College (sixth form) provision is good. Students achieve well, including those who join Year 12 from other schools. The pass rate in A-level examinations is high and overall results match those nationally. Virtually all students stay throughout their courses.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They appreciate the good balance between their being independent and receiving excellent care, guidance and support from their teachers and tutors. They have many opportunities to take on extra responsibilities, including paired reading with younger students. Work shadowing is a strength.

Teaching in the sixth form is good with some particularly strong features. Teachers draw effectively on their knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses, ensuring that they make good progress. The curriculum is good. While the subjects offered are mainly traditional, specialist college status has enhanced the choice available. Many students diversify their interests through enrichment opportunities such as film appreciation and environmental studies, and the good international programme.

The college is well led and managed. Recent improvements in arrangements for guiding the progress of students have been well received by students and their parents and are assisting students' progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly among the more able, by ensuring that teachers use assessment information to plan more effectively and provide activities that move students on in their learning.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of middle managers in setting targets and ensuring that these targets are understood so that students achieve well in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Year 9 and GCSE results are above national averages and represent good achievement by students. Standards observed at the inspection were in line with results. Most students take 10 GCSEs, virtually all achieve at least one graded result and the proportion gaining at least five GCSEs is high. Results reflect especially well on the progress of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, the proportion gaining the highest grades (A*/A) is just average.

Students achieve well at GCSE in mathematics, science, French and German. In history, results have been below national and school averages; the history course followed in Years 10 and 11 has recently been changed. Recent GCSE results in English show considerable improvement, and no longer lag behind those in other subjects. In some years, performance in English has been weak in Year 9. Achievement in performing

arts subjects is broadly in line with that overall in the school. Results in dance and physical education are above average but not so many of the highest (A*/A) grades have been achieved in drama and music.

While girls and boys progress at similar rates across Years 7 to 9, by GCSE the achievement of girls has exceeded that of boys in some years, with lower ability girls performing outstandingly well. In 2006, and in response to school initiatives, boys' GCSE results improved significantly and their achievement outstripped that of girls. Students of minority ethnic backgrounds and at early stages of learning to speak English achieve in line with the rest.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are good, with some strengths, in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Students enjoy school greatly and are keen to learn. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, though spiritual aspects are less well developed. They behave well around the school and in lessons. They show respect for each other and for adults. Students say that they feel safe and are confident that the school will act promptly if they have concerns. Students appreciate the 'buddy' systems and support by sixth formers for reading.

Extra-curricular opportunities are extensive, popular and contribute much to students' personal development. Students have a strong voice in the school through the school council; they know that their views are taken into account and that they can bring about changes, for example, in the installation of water fountains and new benching. Community involvement is a strength and fostered very effectively through the school's role as a specialist college. Joint and outstanding work on a musical production with a national charity for the mentally handicapped benefited greatly students' personal development.

Students have good awareness of the importance of living healthily, assisted by the improved food service and the many sporting activities available. Robust procedures protect the safety of students. The school works exceedingly well in partnership with many other agencies, including the local education authority.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some very good features. Relationships between teachers and students are a strength, reflected in students' good behaviour, hard work and high levels of motivation. Almost all teachers prepare lessons well and set

interesting tasks. These engage students' interest and lead to good progress. In all lessons observed, learning objectives, shared at the start with students, had been adapted to different levels of progress. However, only a minority of teachers in lessons observed actually followed these through by providing varied activities that matched assessment information and the abilities of students, particularly those of higher ability. Good practice was observed in performing arts. In most lessons students have opportunities both for independent learning in their preferred style and for working with others. These enhance students' enjoyment and achievement.

The school's increased emphasis on assessment for learning is paying dividends. Students are taking greater responsibility for their own learning and are increasingly involved in assessing their own progress and that of others. However, some vagueness persists amongst students about how to reach their target levels or grades. Joint teaching projects between various faculties have developed through specialist status. The communication project culminating in a theatre production in Spanish is an outstanding example of innovative and effective strategies which extend students' vocabulary across the curriculum.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. Younger students have opportunities to extend learning in four key areas of expressive and performing arts, reflecting the school's specialist status, and in two modern foreign languages. Two hours each week of physical education support them in developing healthy lifestyles. Good opportunities are provided for the development of their personal and social skills, through regular timetabled lessons and, in Year 7, a course on 'Adventure Learning' which includes team building and outdoor activities.

Older students have a good range of GCSE options and flexibility that allows them to tailor their choices to their interests and aptitudes. Examples include triple award sciences and a vocational double award GCSE in engineering.

Good provision is made for students with learning needs and disabilities including help from support assistants and a Youth Award Scheme runs in Year 10. Opportunities are being developed to provide challenging activities for those identified as gifted and talented.

Extra-curricular opportunities are wide-ranging. A great number of high quality sports, drama and musical events are organised through the performing arts specialism. Visitors from the community frequently support learning. Many trips and special events are arranged, including international exchanges, and they make learning stimulating, interesting and enjoyable.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are good. Students feel well cared for by their teachers and say there is always someone they can turn to if they have a problem. Relationships between staff and students are mutually respectful. The recent introduction of pastoral managers has strengthened the pastoral structure and increased opportunities for year heads to monitor students' academic progress. Bullying is rare and students say that, when it occurs, it is promptly and effectively dealt with.

Induction arrangements for Year 7 students are good. Students and their parents receive good advice about students' progress and their options at Key Stage 4 and in later years. Careers advice and guidance for older students are well provided. The Learning Support Unit offers a secure, supportive and stimulating base for vulnerable students. In the main, students are well aware of their target levels or target grades. Many are less clear about precisely what they need to do to reach those targets, or exceed them. There is some inconsistency in the quality of teachers' marking of work. However, some marking is excellent in its regularity and in the specific guidance it gives students on how to improve.

Induction into the college (sixth form), both for Year 11 students and those joining from elsewhere, is imaginatively prepared and thorough. College students receive outstanding guidance and support. They especially value their regular and individual meetings with tutors, who moderate and support their reviews of their own academic progress and personal development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership by the headteacher is strongly directed to developing support for students so that they can achieve their chosen progression route. Focus on the individual has strengthened the popularity of the school as a neighbourhood school. Development as a performing arts specialist college is well led and managed. This specialism was chosen because of its potential to support achievement across the curriculum, and took account of the views of many connected with the school. Governors review the work of the school, and are proud of its strengths, while keen to see further improvement. Awareness of the importance of equal opportunities is high and reflected in the school's inclusive ethos, as in option choices offered in Years 10 and 11, when all students study a balanced range of subjects.

The school knows itself well. Restructuring of the management of pastoral work and subjects has strengthened the roles of middle managers. Teaching and learning in lessons are monitored rigorously and have led to improvement in lesson planning. Much information is collected on the progress of students and is available to teachers.

This is evaluated strenuously and has led to improvement in results in some subjects, as in mathematics and science, but improvement is not yet impacting consistently on all subjects, or ability groups.

The school is well staffed and resources are good. Careful comparison is made with expenditure in similar schools in order to achieve best value. Key points identified at the last inspection have been tackled and specialist status gained. The rigour of its management arrangements and improving trend in results show the school's capacity to improve is good.

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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
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	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	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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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	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	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

7 December 2006

Dear Students

The School Council, The Boswells School, Burnham Road, Chelmsford, Essex. CM1 6LY

Thank you for your friendly and courteous welcome during our recent inspection of your school. We appreciated the open and helpful way in which you spoke with us. I am writing to let you know what we thought about your school.

We found both the main school and the college (sixth form) to be good. We were particularly impressed with the focus the school places on helping you, so that you enjoy school so much. Your achievements are good at each stage of learning. Your personal development is good in the main school and outstanding in the college, reflecting strengths in the high quality of care, guidance and support provided. Your learning is good, because teaching and the curriculum are good. Many opportunities are provided to enrich learning. Some stem from the school's status as a specialist college in performing arts, as well as the willingness of staff to work in partnership with many outside organisations. Your collaboration with a national charity for the mentally handicapped in a musical production was outstanding. All of these strengths are possible because leadership and management of the school are good, and overall direction by Mr Crowe and senior managers is particularly good.

In order to help you to achieve even better we have asked the school to plan more carefully activities to move you on in your learning. We have also asked heads of skill areas to strengthen their use of targets for subject results. You can help teachers to raise standards further by always concentrating in lessons, and making good use of home learning tasks.

I and my colleague inspectors hope you continue to enjoy school greatly and wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Hilton Lead inspector