



Imberhorne School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126088
Local Authority West Sussex
Inspection number 293465
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Clare Gillies

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive | School address | Imberhorne Lane |
| School category | Community | | East Grinstead |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 | | RH19 1QY |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01342 323562 |
| Number on roll (school) | 1690 | Fax number | 01342 317366 |
| Number on roll (6th form) | 344 | | |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Ann Bolt |
| | | Headteacher | Jonathan Ford |
| Date of previous school inspection | 22 October 2001 | | |

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| Age group | Inspection dates | Inspection number |
| 11–19 | 7–8 March 2007 | 293465 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Imberhorne is a large, oversubscribed, language specialist school. The sixth form is also large. The school has Investor in People status and was awarded Artsmark and Sportsmark awards in 2004. The school is on a split site with Years 7 to 9 based over a mile away from the main site. The accommodation has not kept pace with the school's growth and many areas are cramped. The school has an on-site vocational centre and some students study at another one close-by.

The proportions of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and statements of special educational need are below average. A very low percentage of students takes free school meals. Over 90% of students are from White British backgrounds with small numbers from other ethnic groups. The school has 18 Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage, five looked after children and 16 students at an early stage of learning English as a second language. Standards on entry are slightly above the national average but below that for West Sussex.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's overall effectiveness is good and it has many outstanding features. Achievement is very high in many subjects. The school has successfully generated a culture that 'It's cool to learn; education is more precious than gold'. Recent innovations have increased students' motivation and led to rising standards. These include giving each student a staff mentor and having a graduation ceremony for Year 11 students.

Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11 as students' achievement in Years 7 to 11 is excellent in several subjects and good in most of the others. Students receive high quality careers advice as well as acquiring the essential skills to proceed into further education, training or employment. Students study diligently and attentively and teaching and learning are good with some outstanding practice. This includes, especially in Years 7 to 9, teachers asking excellent questions which check and extend students' understanding, a fast pace, imaginative activities and effective use of interactive whiteboards. The school is working to spread such good practice.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding and they mature into articulate, confident and happy young adults. They behave well, are considerate and thoughtful. This is because all of them, including those with learning difficulties, receive exceptional care, guidance and support in all years. A strength of the citizenship and personal, social and health education programme is the school's realism about what students encounter beyond the school gates. Students are fully aware of the importance of health and safety in their lives.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher and senior leadership team, along with many confident heads of department and year heads, are not complacent but always seeking new ideas to raise achievement. This is done by penetrating, realistic evaluation of everything the school offers. The whole school focus last year on 'making underachievement unacceptable' was developed from the conviction that 'everyone can succeed'.

The excellent curriculum offers a wealth of courses to match the wide range of students' aptitudes and interests. Reflecting the school's specialism, the curriculum is particularly strong in modern foreign languages. Well developed overseas links, such as those with Tanzania and several European countries, benefit students' appreciation of other cultures and extend their global awareness. Closer to home, numerous musical and sporting events, an interesting range of extra-curricular activities and many trips and visits help to make school life enjoyable.

Parents are very pleased with the education their children receive and all members of the school community can easily keep in touch with school life by using the informative, clearly set-out website. The school has ambitious information and technology communication (ICT) systems that allow students to learn as easily at home as in class.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good and improving. It has grown by almost one third over the last six years because its results have improved and it is increasingly popular. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Students' personal development is excellent and they are very well motivated. As a result, a high proportion of students stay on between Years 12 and 13.

Students are provided with very good support and guidance and kept well informed about how they are doing. Teaching and learning are good. The curriculum is outstanding with the very wide range of courses being well matched to students' needs and abilities. There is also an excellent range of enrichment activities and educational trips. The sixth form is extremely well led and managed. The sixth form common room is cramped with inadequate facilities for the increasing number of students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen teaching and learning to raise standards and achievement even further by sharing the good practice that exists in asking questions which check progress and extend students' thinking; keeping up a good pace; incorporating a variety of activities; and using interactive whiteboards effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average. Between Years 7 to 11 students make excellent progress in the majority of subjects. For several years, students have done particularly well in the science tests taken at the end of Year 9. Following a period of intensive work on standards in mathematics, the percentage of students attaining the higher levels almost doubled in 2006. Year 9 English test results dipped slightly in 2006 and achievement was only satisfactory so the school is now focusing on improving performance in this subject.

GCSE results have gone up since the last inspection, especially in 2006 when almost two thirds of students attained five or more grades A*–C including English and mathematics. The percentage of A* and A grades also improved. Girls do better than boys in practically all subjects except mathematics and the school continues to work on reducing the gap. There is no difference in achievement between any groups of students. The high GCSE grades in German and Italian reflect the school's language specialism.

Sixth form standards have risen steadily in recent years. They are now above average, with over 40% A/B grades in 2006. Achievement, especially in vocational subjects, is good. It is outstanding in several subjects, for example health and social care, sociology, theatre studies, business and economics. Fluctuations and differences between standards in subjects partly reflect the school's encouragement of participation in

further education by not making entry requirements too tight. They also reflect a lack of rigour in monitoring students' progress in the past. This has now been tackled and the 2006 AS results, grades for vocational courses, and the work seen reveal that students are achieving well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is excellent as a result of the richness of the curriculum and the wide variety of opportunities provided for students to experience other cultures through the school's comprehensive local and international links. Students and teachers from several countries visit and spend time working in the school. Students are aware of the importance of physical exercise and healthy foods and enjoy the wide range of opportunities for sport and physical activity. Students' behaviour is extremely good and their attendance is good. Exclusions are rare. Bullying is taken very seriously and students have no concerns about this and are also convinced that racism is not present in the school community.

Students feel safe, greatly enjoy the education they receive and value highly the support they are given. Many commented that this is a good school and they enjoy being there. The school seeks students' views and, when possible, responds to their concerns. For example, a considerable amount of money was spent refurbishing the toilets throughout the school. This gave students a clear message that the school wants to treat them respectfully and listens to their views. Mainly because of the split site, the school council is not a key force for discussion but the regular meetings of form representatives with year heads are effective.

Students engage in numerous charitable activities and older students are encouraged to serve the school and local community as role models and mentors. Students are well prepared for the realities of the outside world, through the very comprehensive citizenship programme, work experience and careers advice, and especially through initiatives such as the annual employers' breakfast where local business leaders provide insights. A highlight of the school year is the Year 11 graduation ceremony where students' achievements and contributions to the school are recognised by the award of graded certificates.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In Years 7 to 9, teachers set very high expectations of how students should behave and learn and students respond very positively. Most students retain these disciplines of excellent work habits well. Teachers encourage students to think for themselves

and discuss complex issues. The vitality evident in much teaching produces students who are keen to be involved in their own learning. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, greatly enhancing the enjoyment and progress made in lessons.

In many lessons students make outstanding progress, exceeding targets and expectations. Some teachers, especially in Years 7 to 9, are skilled at checking on students' understanding during lessons, responding to their answers by posing yet more penetrating questions or using interactive whiteboards to make lessons fun. Such good practice is not yet widespread, and occasionally the pace drops in the hour-long lessons.

Regular tests and effective tracking of progress ensure that all students know their targets and most can identify what to do to reach them. Gifted and talented students are given much encouragement and provided with stimulating activities to match their needs. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified carefully, but lesson planning does not match their learning needs in all subjects or during withdrawal sessions. The impact of the latter is not evaluated thoroughly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides an exceptional curriculum for its students, with a very broad range of vocational and academic courses in Years 10 to 13. Many students take two modern foreign languages for GCSE and several of them study languages, including Mandarin, after school if they wish. The on-site and off-site vocational centres are nationally recognised as providing excellent education.

The school's encouragement of all forms of success is witnessed by the wealth of conferences, visits and trips which take place each week. Provision for citizenship, personal, social and health education is excellent, with outstanding opportunities for personal and cultural development through the extensive range of after school clubs and lunchtime activities. Music, drama and arts are well represented and the school enjoys considerable sporting success. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is increasingly popular and Challenge 21, taken by Year 10, is a valuable programme involving community work.

Careers education prepares students very well for the next stages of their educational development. It helps them to succeed by building their confidence. Language specialist status has built on the school's extensive links with schools and colleges in Europe and elsewhere, to the evident benefit of its students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Outstanding care contributes to students' good academic achievement and personal development. All students have a mentor with whom they meet at least three times a

year. Teachers use the wealth of data about students' standards and achievements to monitor progress and to set challenging targets. Students know their current levels and grades and what they should be aiming for.

Support for students with emotional or behavioural difficulties, from teachers, support staff and from sixth formers is outstanding. The school has extensive links with external agencies to meet students' needs. The excellent school website helps everyone keep up to date with work and the many exciting things that are happening in school. Transitions are handled well, whether for new students, Year 10 students entering the upper school, or school leavers. Support for vulnerable students is excellent and provision for students from travelling families has been externally verified as exemplary. Procedures for safeguarding students are fully in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher has a keen focus on continued improvement. He rightly describes a strength of the senior leadership team as its blend of 'experience and freshness'. The members of the team complement each other's skills. They are independently resourceful at the same time as being very supportive of the headteacher.

Many heads of departments and heads of year enthusiastically seek new ways to generate enjoyment and higher standards. They attack weaknesses methodically and monitor whether changes have the right impact. The school tackled the issues raised in the previous inspection report as well as it could. The accommodation was extended but, as numbers have increased, it is already tight again. Although popular with parents, the split site generates significant demands on managers' and teachers' time.

In the last three years the headteacher has turned a financial deficit into a balanced budget. The improvements in the school demonstrate its excellent capacity to make further improvements, especially in the sixth form. Its self-evaluation is extremely honest and effective, generating sharp three-year plans with a particular focus for each year.

All members of staff are fully involved in debating improvement issues through school improvement groups. These are made up of teachers who have a particular interest in the issue under consideration, a member of the senior leadership team and a member of the governing body. These groups are an effective way of developing improvements.

The governing body brings a wealth of relevant expertise and experience to its deliberations. The governors decided that they want to keep abreast of all elements of the school's progress so they are trialling having a full meeting once a month and no sub-committees. Governors and all staff put into practice their conviction that every student must be given the right academic and non-academic opportunities to achieve their very best.

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

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| <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? | 2 | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 | 1 |
| 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 | 2 |
| 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? | 1 | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | |
| 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 | 1 | |

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? | 1 | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 | 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? | 1 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 | |
| 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 | 1 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 | |
| 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

Thank you so much for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting some of you and wish we had been able to talk to more of you. It was excellent to hear that many of you think Imberhorne is an enjoyable school to attend and we definitely agree with you. In fact we have described the school as having many outstanding features and its overall effectiveness as good.

The leadership and management of your school are excellent at all levels. The headteacher and senior management team, and teachers and non-academic staff, all work very hard to ensure that you achieve as well as possible. You make very good progress and GCSE and sixth form results have gone up steadily in recent years. We are sure that you will do as well, if not better.

You clearly appreciate the new mentor system which gives you a chance to have a helpful conversation with a member of staff and there is no doubt that the graduation ceremony is the highlight of the year for those of you in Year 11. The support you receive, whether for your studies or to help you with any problems, is outstanding and the choice of subjects you can study, particularly in languages, is excellent.

We were most impressed with your behaviour, both around the school and in class. You get on well together and your respect for each other and teachers made it a pleasure to watch lessons and to see what excellent work habits you have acquired. You are taught, and learn, well and we saw a few fantastic lessons. Some teachers are particularly skilful at planning interesting lessons, using the interactive whiteboards well or asking questions which make you think for yourselves and thus learn really successfully. So, as an area for improvement, we have asked the school to try and make as many lessons as possible up to the standard of the very best.

We wish you well for your futures and happiness and success in your lives.