



The John of Gaunt School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126462
Local Authority Wiltshire
Inspection number 293564
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Wingfield Road
School category	Community		Trowbridge
Age range of pupils	11–18		BA14 9EH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01225 762637
Number on roll (school)	1154	Fax number	01225 777475
Number on roll (6th form)	204		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Vacant Position
		Headteacher	Andrew Packer
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	7–8 March 2007	293564

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The John of Gaunt School, which is a specialist school for mathematics, science and computing, is larger than the average comprehensive school. Fewer students than average are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average but the school is a designated resource base for students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Very few students have English as an additional language or are in the early stages of learning English. The school became an Extended School in 2005 and has gained the Investor in People award. It works in partnership with other schools in the area as part of the Trowbridge Sixth Form Centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. Students, staff and parents talk enthusiastically about the considerable change in culture that has occurred over the past year, noting especially the improved standards of behaviour and a more positive climate for learning. This has come about through the headteacher's clear determination to raise standards and ensure that all students do as well as they possibly can. Parents appreciate the improved relationships they now have with the school and their attendance at consultation and other information meetings has increased.

The school has been through a period in which standards have been well below average and many students have underachieved. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching, brought about by more stable staffing, external support from consultants and better monitoring of work in classrooms, have led to higher standards and faster progress. The school's specialist status is also having a positive impact on raising standards. Standards remain below average overall but students' achievement is satisfactory as they are making better progress than previously, especially in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). This is evident in the school's 2006 results for the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A*–C including English and mathematics, which was similar to the national figures. However, this improvement is not the case in all other subjects, as some subject leaders are not doing enough to check the quality of the work in their areas of responsibility. Students need consistently good, rather than the current satisfactory, teaching to secure further improvement as well as more challenging targets.

Students are friendly and polite and treat others with respect. Their personal development and well-being, as well as the care, guidance and support they receive, are satisfactory. Most students have responded well to the new behaviour policy although a few have yet to abide by the school's clear expectations. Attendance is below average, as a small minority of students do not attend regularly, despite the school's efforts to encourage them to do so. Students make a good contribution to the school and local community.

The curriculum is good and is enriched by a wide range of activities and visits, many undertaken as part of the school's specialist programme. These contribute positively to raising students' aspirations and enhancing their personal development. The school has good links with the community and other agencies to support students' learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Much of the school's progress in the past two years has come about because of the resolute leadership of the headteacher to put 'learning' at the centre of its work. His senior leadership team share his approach. Their view of the school's strengths and weaknesses is generally accurate but the school as a whole lacks robust systems to check the effectiveness of the actions it takes, to set challenging targets for students and monitor their progress systematically, or to hold middle leaders sufficiently to account for raising standards further. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good because of the lack of consistency in the work of some middle leaders.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory and as a result of satisfactory teaching, they reach broadly average standards at A level. The school, in partnership with another local school, provides students with a wide range of advanced level subjects, but very few vocational subjects because opportunities are available in a nearby college. However, this restricts the choice for students who might wish to combine academic and vocational study.

Students feel supported in the sixth form and retention rates are high. A caring ethos ensures that all students are valued and included. Their progress is tracked against individual targets based on their GCSE examination performance. Tutors have easy access to this data and use it appropriately in guidance interviews with students. In some subjects, the targets set are routinely exceeded, indicating that they could be more challenging. Some subjects provide extra sessions for students in danger of underachieving, but, in contrast to the situation in Years 10 and 11, this support is inconsistent and students are not routinely encouraged to join such groups. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Although the support role is carried out effectively, the monitoring of the provision made for students is insufficiently developed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement a rigorous whole-school approach to target-setting and ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment to check students' progress.
- Introduce robust and systematic whole-school procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's performance.
- Hold middle leaders more effectively to account for the quality of work in their areas of responsibility, especially in raising standards.
- With the support of parents and the education welfare service, raise levels of attendance and reduce the extent of unauthorised absence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory. Their attainment when they enter the school is broadly average but many have weak literacy and numeracy skills. Standards are below average, but most students are making satisfactory progress although not consistently across all subjects. The school's results in national tests and GCSE examinations have been well below average in recent years but showed a modest improvement in 2006. With the support of the local authority, the school has implemented several strategies to tackle previous underachievement. These are beginning to have a positive impact on the students' progress and on their achievement. This impact is particularly evident in English in Years 7 to 9, where standards have been well below those in mathematics

and science, but are now close to the national average. Although the school's overall results in the GCSE examinations have been well below average, mainly because of the considerable variation in the performance of individual subjects, the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A*–C including English and mathematics was similar to the national figure in 2006. The school has rightly placed an emphasis on ensuring that students leave school with qualifications in these two key subjects.

The school's strategies for identifying students who are in danger of underachieving and offering them additional support through extra sessions after school, as well as a concerted effort by senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching and the climate for learning in the school, are helping to raise standards as well as students' aspirations. This work, though, is still in its infancy and is not yet consistent across the school, including the sixth form. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress, but some of the work given to the higher attainers does not always stretch them enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most students enjoy school and attend regularly, although attendance rates are below average as a small minority of students choose not to come to school regularly. Behaviour is satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection, and students are generally sensible when moving around the dispersed school buildings. A small minority are not as prompt as they should be to lessons and there are a few instances of silly behaviour in corridors. Most students feel safe because they are confident in the staff's ability to sort out their concerns. Bullying remains an issue for a minority, but the school is taking robust steps to tackle it.

Students have a satisfactory understanding of how to keep safe and lead healthy lifestyles. They are beginning to eat more healthily although the vast majority choose crisps in preference to a healthy snack. Students make a good contribution to the school community. The school council is very active in seeking the views of students and acting on them. It has brought about many improvements to the school's environment and to students' feeling of well-being. Students enjoy community activities such as working in other schools, producing musical performances and welcoming elderly people into the school. The improvement in students' core skills, their personal development and their participation in other experiences, such as enterprise week and running the school bank, are preparing them satisfactorily for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has placed a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, receiving good support from external consultants. Senior staff rightly consider this an important element in helping students make faster progress. There are many examples of good teaching and in these lessons, students make better progress because they receive work that is closely matched to their needs and challenges them. They respond with evident interest to well directed questions and clear explanations. These good features are not apparent in all lessons, with the result that students' progress, especially of the more able students, is more restricted, being satisfactory rather than good.

Nearly all teachers set out the objectives of the lesson although what students are to learn is not always clear. In a few lessons, students take a little while to settle, but once engaged in activity they work well. Most teachers mark students' work regularly, making supportive and encouraging comments. Some good examples of helpful diagnostic marking exist, which guide students well on how to improve their work, but such comments are not a consistent part of teaching and learning in all subjects. Not enough use is made of assessment information to plan teaching and ensure that the work is appropriate for all students in the class, especially the higher attainers and the lower attainers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is carefully organised to meet the needs of students in the school and has an appropriate focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. In Years 10 and 11, a set of pathways for students ensures that each is able to choose from a range of courses, including those with a vocational slant, depending on their potential and preferences. Students who are unlikely to achieve high grades in GCSE English and mathematics are able to choose 'Study Plus', which allows them to exchange one of their optional subjects for extra help with these basic skills. This provision has been identified as a model of good practice. Students in danger of missing a grade C attend twice-weekly sessions to help them catch up with, for example, coursework assignments. These sessions are well attended.

Specialist status has led to a number of enhancements to the curriculum, especially for students who are identified as gifted and talented. Exciting projects, like building rockets with rocket scientists, and links with universities and abroad, engage students well. The school provides a good range of such additional activities, including a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. The newly formed pastoral team has introduced a number of new initiatives to support students. The new behaviour policy is an example of one that is already having a positive impact on students' learning, enabling them to make faster progress than in the past.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and procedures for child protection are clear and effective. The school is working hard to improve attendance, which is below average, but has lacked the support of an educational welfare officer for some time. As a result, some poor attenders have not been picked up quickly enough. The school's strong links with outside agencies, for example the Young People's Support Service, mean that the needs of different groups of students, including those that might be deemed vulnerable, are met effectively.

Students receive satisfactory guidance on their academic progress and development but the school lacks a systematic whole-school approach to target setting. In many subjects, students know their targets and are clear about what they need to do to reach the next level. In other subjects, targets are not always challenging enough and the quality of advice given to students about how they can improve their work is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher, senior team and governing body share a clear educational vision for the school as one that achieves highly. Since his appointment in 2004, the headteacher has taken a determined approach to tackling many of the weaknesses in the school's provision, with much success. The new senior leadership team has brought a fresh impetus to the school's development and is already making a mark on improving aspects of its work. Many staff, students and parents speak warmly of a 'culture change' in the school this academic year following the implementation of the 'Behaviour for Learning' policy.

The effectiveness of middle managers varies markedly, as does the extent to which they subscribe to this change in culture. The absence of robust systems for holding middle leaders to account for standards in their subjects, and a lack of rigour in some procedures for self-evaluation, result in too much inconsistency in students' experiences. Assessment information is not centrally recorded in a way that enables leaders to compare rates of progress between classes, subjects and teachers to identify underperformance. The school's development plan includes appropriate priorities but the criteria by which its success can be measured lack clarity, and progress on realising its targets is not rigorously evaluated. Nevertheless, these priorities, together with sound strategic planning, indicate a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

The governing body operates satisfactorily, although it does not ensure that all students attend a daily act of collective worship. Governors are insufficiently involved in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the development plans. They keep a close eye on the school's finances so that the school is well prepared for a demographic fall in numbers anticipated next year.

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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	3	3
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?	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	2	
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?	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	3	
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 for being so friendly and welcoming when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting some of you in discussion groups and finding out what you think about the school. These discussions, together with looking at your work in lessons, helped us to find out how well your school is doing. This letter is to tell you what we found.

The school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education and most of you are making satisfactory progress. Standards are rising in the school, but not consistently across all subjects, especially in Years 10 and 11. Some of the targets you are given are too low and we think you are capable of doing better. Most of you work hard in lessons, especially when the work is interesting, but a few of you chatter too much and do not concentrate sufficiently on doing the best you can. This means that you do not always make enough progress in your learning. Some of you, especially the more able students, are capable of making even faster progress than you currently do and we would like the staff to give you more challenging work to help you do this. Although the teaching is satisfactory, we think you need more good teaching if this is to happen, especially in the way that your work is marked and in the guidance you get from teachers on what you need to do to improve your work.

You told us that you like being in the school and that your teachers give you the right kind of support, especially when you have difficulties and problems. Most of you are friendly and polite to one another and behave as the school expects you to do. A small number of you are not always kind to other students and do not attend school regularly enough.

The headteacher and his senior colleagues know what the school does well and what it needs to do to get better, and they have put in place a number of changes already. We have asked the school to develop more robust systems for checking the school's work and the progress you are making, and to ensure that heads of subject and year leaders all work in a consistent way to give you the best possible opportunities to do well. You can help them by always attending regularly and working to the best of your ability.

We were particularly impressed with the environmental work that Years 7 and 8 students are doing in Clanger Wood and consider that you make a good contribution to the school and local community. We wish you all the very best for your future careers.