



The Cavendish School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117528
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 294582
Inspection dates 8–9 March 2007
Reporting inspector Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Warners End Road
School category	Community		Hemel Hempstead
Age range of pupils	11–19		Hertfordshire HP1 3DW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 404333
Number on roll (school)	1139	Fax number	01442 404378
Number on roll (6th form)	159		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Terry Douris
		Headteacher	Dr Stephen Pam
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	8–9 March 2007	294582

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The Cavendish School, a specialist sports college, mainly serves local families. Students are of predominantly White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is lower than average but the percentage of students who have learning difficulties or disabilities is similar to national figures. Over half of the teaching staff has been recruited in the last three years. The sixth form is part of the West Dacorum Partnership for Learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Cavendish School is improving and provides a satisfactory quality of education, a view endorsed by the school. It has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in November 2005. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The determined leadership of the headteacher, effectively supported by the senior team, has enabled the school to improve sixth-form provision so that it is now satisfactory. Despite turbulence in staffing, the school has sustained satisfactory teaching and learning overall but with a greater proportion of good lessons than at the last inspection. Standards have risen to match national figures at the end of Year 11 although too few students gain higher grades in both English and mathematics. Overall students achieve satisfactorily, although girls make faster progress than boys, particularly those in the middle-attaining group. Attendance and punctuality have both improved and the good curriculum now includes helpful additional support for Year 7 pupils when they join the school. Governance has strengthened and is now good with the school held rigorously to account. This clear evidence indicates the school's satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Most students and parents are supportive of the school. However, around half of the parents who returned questionnaires were concerned about boisterous behaviour in the playground and some low-level disruption in some classrooms. Neither was evident during the inspection. Personal development is satisfactory. However, many students have yet to develop a sense of responsibility for their environment and readily leave litter for others to manage. A real strength of the school is the impact of the sports college on many aspects of school life. Students know about keeping healthy and participate well in physical activities. Community links are strong, as are out-of-hours activities. Students report feeling safe and enjoy coming to school although they are not always enthusiastic about learning or about involving themselves in worthwhile activities at lunchtimes. Some students make a difference to others through service in the community, particularly through the sports college and through raising funds for local and international charities. Others contribute helpfully through the school and year councils and the mentoring of younger students. Effective personal and social education and personal guidance prepare students well for the future choices. Around half of Year 11 students choose to remain at school for their post-16 education.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Self-evaluation at senior level is robust but the school has accurately identified that middle managers' effectiveness in monitoring learning is too variable. Students in Years 7 to 9, although reaching close to average standards overall, achieve less well than they should in English and mathematics. Boys' progress is slower than expected because too little attention is paid to developing their writing and organisational skills. Information to check students' progress is used increasingly rigorously at whole-school level but the quality of departmental and classroom marking and recording practice is too variable.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The quality of provision in the sixth form is satisfactory, and the school agrees. There has been steady progress from the last inspection. Standards are broadly in line with national figures and students achieve satisfactorily. The current Year 12 is making sound progress as is Year 13. Accommodation has been much improved and students appreciate the quiet study area.

Sixth formers enjoy their studies, and appreciate the help they receive from teachers and other members of staff. Students have access to a good curriculum because of the school's collaboration with the local consortium. There are a wide range of vocational as well as academic courses. Students are looked after effectively and their personal development is satisfactory. Teaching in the sixth form is also satisfactory. Students say that they 'really enjoy their lessons this year'. They are particularly pleased with the guidance that supports their independent learning skills. Their contribution to the local community through the sports college is good. Academic monitoring is rigorous but students consider that the short form periods are unhelpful as there is too little time for effective guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students achieving GCSE Grade C or better in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of day-to-day information to students on how to improve their work.
- Ensure that in lessons more is expected of students, particularly in boys' writing, presentation and organisation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are average in the main school and at the end of Year 13. From a broadly average base, students achieve satisfactorily by the end of Year 11. Girls make faster progress than boys, particularly those in the middle-attaining range. This is partly because of difficulties with boys' literacy skills. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve satisfactorily as do post-16 students in Year 13.

Despite the encouraging rise in examination results in the year since the previous inspection, students do not achieve equally well in all subject areas. Whereas over half of Year 11 students gained five or more higher GCSE grades in 2006, the proportion that included grade C or better in English and mathematics, a third, remained unchanged. Information on the current Year 11 indicates that this proportion is likely to improve significantly in 2007. Students, particularly girls, achieve better in English than in mathematics. Particularly successful subjects include design and technology,

English, French, German and physical education. The latter reflects the school's specialist status as a sports college.

Following a steady rise over several years, the 2006 test results at the end of Year 9 also improved although remaining below the school's challenging targets. Standards were close to average. Students achieved satisfactorily overall, although disappointingly in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students enjoy coming to school and mixing with friends. Most attend regularly and their punctuality has improved since the last inspection. Nevertheless, some lack a real sense of urgency in learning. Their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is satisfactory although their understanding of cultures other than their own is limited. They are generally courteous, willing and helpful but sometimes thoughtless, for example, about polluting the school environment with litter. Some also take little pride in their written work and general organisation.

Many express their views confidently and are constructive in suggesting how the school can improve, particularly through year councils. Behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory. Students say that they feel safe and that any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Most students understand about how to keep healthy. They are aware of possible dangers related to smoking, solvent and drug abuse. A high number participate in the many physical activities provided through the sports college. Students are proud of their involvement as sports leaders and of their contribution to others' enjoyment in exercise. They take fundraising events seriously and help raise considerable sums for charities. Students are increasingly ready to take advantage of the healthy menus provided by the catering staff. They are positive about the good personal guidance they receive so that they feel able to make informed choices about their future education and training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school has made good progress in increasing the proportion of good teaching since the last inspection. Clear guidance, regular monitoring linked to training activities, and accurate judgements on the quality of classroom practice underpin the school's progress.

Warm working relationships are reflected in the positive learning environment in many lessons. Students respond well to the well-managed group work and wide range of activities in lessons. In a successful English lesson, for example, teaching made good use of students' enthusiastic oral responses through role-playing and discussion to heighten their understanding of poetry. The influence of the good assessment practice initiated in physical education and sport is evident in a number of classes.

Despite these good features, students are not always helped to become effective independent learners. There are still a few lessons where students engage in work less readily because activities are not challenging enough or matched well enough to their needs. The quality of marking is inconsistent across the school. It does not always enable students to know how well they are doing or show them how to improve their work to meet targets. Board work by some teachers is presented poorly in some classes and this is reflected in some students' carelessly organized written work and presentation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of students well. An increasingly wide range of vocational courses and work-related opportunities in Years 10 and 11 offer helpful pathways into further education, training and employment. Provision for personal, health, social and citizenship education is good. It supports students' personal development satisfactorily. The newly-developed transition curriculum offers good support for students moving from primary schools to Year 7.

Provision for basic skills is satisfactory although the school recognizes the need to enhance literacy skills, especially for boys. Students' learning is enriched by a wide range of out-of-hours activities, especially in sport. The specialist sports college has forged links with other subject areas. English, for example, uses sports commentaries to engage students. Through the local consortium, links with neighboring schools provide post-16 students with a wide range of routes into further education or work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The caring ethos provided by staff, including the matron, ensures students feel safe and well supported. The small group of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are well provided for. This is reflected in parents' comments and further enhanced by good links with the local authority and other external agencies. Through the sports college, partnership with primary schools is strong and enables the early identification of need within the incoming Year 7 students.

Systematic whole-school procedures now check on students' academic achievement. A range of interventions to tackle any underachievement are beginning to have a positive effect on students' progress. Good personal guidance is offered to students about future careers and life choices. However, day-to day-academic guidance to students on how to improve their work is not yet good enough in all subject areas.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some aspects are good, particularly the headteacher's role in managing the school's positive response to the areas of significant concern from the last inspection. The sports college is ably led, as is the sixth form. The impact is evident in the upturn in post-16 students' module results, in the faster progress of Year 11, and in the improving teaching. Staff are better focused on raising standards and their morale is good. In recent months, robust action has improved the recruitment and retention of staff. Governance is good under the guidance of an able chair. Their high level of support for the school is well tempered by challenge and in-depth knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses.

Middle leaders increasingly share the senior team's vision for school improvement. However, the skill with which they manage their areas is still too variable and this is reflected in the differing standards reached by students across the curriculum. Too much still depends on senior managers. The school's evaluation of its progress is generally accurate and senior managers recognise that despite improved whole-school assessment systems, there remain weaknesses in departmental procedures. Not all teachers effectively guide students on how to improve their day-to day work. The quality of teaching is also too variable and not enough attention has been paid to improving literacy skills across the curriculum. Good support from the local authority has bolstered the school's progress since the last inspection. Its capacity to improve further is satisfactory. The views of parents and students are sought, listened to carefully and where possible used to inform changes.

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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	2	2
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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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	2
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	2	
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

9 February 2007

The Cavendish School, Warners End Road, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3DW

Dear Students

After our visit to Cavendish 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, especially the sporting opportunities. We are equally pleased that you mostly behave sensibly in class and around the site. Your attendance has improved as has your punctuality to school. You know about keeping healthy and many of you are taking good advantage of the wholesome menus in the canteen. Many of you are also making a difference to others through contributions to the school, local and international communities. We heard that you get good experience of working life and that helpful advice on the next stages of education assists you in making suitable choices.

You told us that you find your teachers 'help you a lot' and that you think your school is improving, particularly the sixth form. We agree with you that your school has made steady progress in the last year. Governors are keeping a careful eye on improvements. A good deal has been done to improve teaching and most of you make satisfactory progress by Year 11. We also agree that in the sixth form you make satisfactory progress. Some things, however, could be even better. Not enough of you get Grade C or better in both GCSE English and mathematics. Some of you, particularly boys, make slower progress than expected. Sometimes this is because you pay too little attention to writing skills and are badly organised. Some teaching, however, still does not expect enough of you and we have asked teachers to pay greater attention to your writing and the organisation of your work, especially for boys.

We are confident that your school will continue to improve because you have an able headteacher and senior staff who together with the governors strive to do their best for you. We hope you will also work to improve your school further. You could start by taking care not to drop litter both in the playground and in the canteen. Some of you could take your academic work more seriously and follow up teachers' advice in your written work.

We wish you all the best for your future success and hope you will help your school to fulfil its motto of 'adding value to all'.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector