

Copthall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101349
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	307662
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1119
6th form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Hallworth
Headteacher	Ms Jane Beaumont
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2004
School address	Pursley Road Mill Hill London NW7 2EP
Telephone number	020 8959 1937
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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

Copthall School students come from a wide range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The largest ethnic groups are the one fifth of students who are White British and one sixth who are of Black African heritage. About two thirds speak a home language other than English. Although few are at early stages of fluency in English, this number has risen recently through students joining after the beginning of Year 7. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. There are fewer than average students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Students join the school with a wide range of attainment that is broadly average overall. The school has business and enterprise specialist status and took on a second specialism in languages in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Copthall School is a good school. Students make good progress and reach standards that are above average by the end of Key Stage 4. They enjoy coming to school, where they feel particularly safe and get on well together. All students contribute to the community, including through activities linked to the business, enterprise and languages specialist status. The good curriculum is permeated by these subject areas, and offers a good range of academic subjects with some vocational and alternative options, and many popular enrichment activities.

Teachers use their subject knowledge well to give good interesting lessons that enable students to make good progress. Much of the marking of students' work provides them with clear targets and guidance for improvement, but some does not do this well enough to ensure good progress. There is variation across learning co-ordinators and subject departments in systems for using assessment to track progress and set targets for students, including those who join the school without Key Stage 2 results.

Care, guidance and support are good, with strong pastoral teams that know students well. Many vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, are supported well by their teachers and teaching assistants but shortcomings in records and planning systems result in inconsistent quality of support in lessons. Although there is a lack of strategic cohesion across inclusion and there have been difficulties in securing staffing in the special educational needs faculty, the overall care provided for these students enables them to make similar progress to others. The school's work to improve attendance is having some impact but not raising it fast enough, so it remains below average.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's good leadership has sharpened the focus of management on teaching and progress, and involved middle and senior leaders in evaluation that is accurate and has led to improvement. This demonstrates good capacity to continue to improve. The school rightly identified assessment and attendance as priorities for improvement, and plans to introduce a new software system this year to facilitate development.

The specialisms are a strength of the school, along with performing arts. They have had a positive effect on the school's provision and the school has been re-designated with specialist status as a result of meeting its business and enterprise performance and community targets.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The sixth form is well established and has recently grown in size after fluctuations. It recruits well from within the school and from other institutions. It offers a wide range of Level 3 courses at GCE advanced level, supplemented by a limited number of vocational options and Levels 1 and 2 courses. Attainment on the AS and A level courses is exceptionally high and students make outstanding progress. Personal development in the sixth form is good. Students enjoy school. They have very positive attitudes to study, contribute strongly to the school and local community, and are well prepared for their future.

The good leadership and management of the sixth form is recognised by the students. Well-targeted actions based on precise evaluation have led to significant improvement, and indicate an outstanding capacity to improve. The sixth form provides outstanding care, guidance and support. Students are supported through a structured tutorial system. Their progress is

thoroughly monitored and all are aware of their targets and how to achieve them. Staff provide excellent support to those who are performing below their full potential or who are experiencing difficulties. It is the extremely thorough tracking and support of progress, together with the particularly good specialist teaching, including some in small classes, that enables the students to make outstanding progress. The school is working in various ways to address the small class size, which is subsidised by the main school, and the range of courses on offer. There is a good variety of enrichment activities within the curriculum and after school, especially in the areas of music and drama.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise progress, in particular through more streamlined tracking against targets and more consistent use of assessment to guide students on how to improve.
- Improve the planning, recording and support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Increase attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are making good progress between joining school and the end of Key Stage 4, where they reach above average standards overall and in English and mathematics. In recent years, progress has been much stronger during Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. After a dip in 2007, the school's data show that Key Stage 3 progress has since risen. Progress during Key Stage 4 has increased gradually in the last two years. The school's records indicate that the progress that current students are making during Key Stage 4 is greater than in 2007. In particular, the groups that made below expected progress then, lower prior attainers and those with Black African heritage, are no longer doing so. No groups are underachieving.

In the sixth form, standards reached in A level and AS level examinations in 2006 were exceptionally high. After a slight drop in 2007, the school's information shows that they look set to return to being exceptionally high in 2008. Students made excellent progress overall in A level and AS level in 2007, but there were a few subjects, including vocational business courses, in which performance was below average. In each of these courses, the school has taken steps to ensure that current groups of students studying them are making at least expected progress, and its records show this to be the case. Consequently, progress in the sixth form is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy coming to school. They feel particularly safe from bullying and racism. Their strong awareness of health and safety procedures and risk leads them to act very safely. They get on well with each other and with staff, and feel confident that they have someone to turn to if they have worries.

Attitudes to learning and behaviour are generally good, although on isolated occasions students' behaviour inhibits progress or well-being, and some parents have concerns about behaviour.

There is a declining number of incidents that lead to exclusions. Attendance is below average and not rising fast enough. The school has rightly prioritised this as an area to improve and is targeting those with high absences. Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties benefit from the school's interventions to promote their engagement and attendance, for example the provision for anger management.

Students respond positively to the school's commitment to healthy eating and provision of physical activities, although not all receive two hours of physical education (PE) or dance a week. All students contribute to the community, such as through participating in assemblies on themes of their choice. The school's specialist status involves them well with local schools or businesses and in teamwork that prepares them suitably for the future. Many of them help younger students, particularly the sixth-form students, and there are good examples of vulnerable students supporting their peers. The school council participates well in consultation through meetings with staff and governors, and feels that it makes an impact. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good but students do not share together in reflection each day.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Specialist status has supported the increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) and innovations in teaching. Most teachers are subject specialists with a passion for their subject. They employ a good range of activities that interest and involve students, taking account of differences in learning styles. In particular, students find teachers' use of interactive whiteboards helpful in conveying ideas clearly. Most students contribute well to their learning by working conscientiously. In the best lessons, high quality resources tailored closely to the purpose of the lesson help students understand precisely what they need to do to improve and make at least good progress. Teachers' very good classroom management skills and effective use of the school's policy when a behaviour incident occurs ensure productive lessons.

Teachers have increasingly used data to match teaching more closely to students' needs and challenge them. In many cases, the guidance and targets they write on students' work help them to improve but they are not consistently good enough to support good progress. In the smaller number of less successful lessons, students listen for lengthy periods so are not involved sufficiently actively or in work that challenges all of them. On occasions, their interest wanes and some off-task behaviour occurs. In lessons, support by teachers and teaching assistants for students with learning difficulties or disabilities is inconsistent. While some is well informed and targeted, not all is routinely planned or organised. Nevertheless, this group of students overall makes similar progress to others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets students' needs well and enables them to take a large number of courses. It is permeated by the school's specialisms. There are business and enterprise activities for all

and an increasing number of vocational courses, some provided with partners. All students study at least one modern foreign language, and an additional form of accreditation has been introduced to increase accessibility for some students. There are exciting language projects and enterprise events, such as the modern languages globalization conference and a fashion show.

Since the last inspection, provision for ICT has been much better resourced. All students study ICT at Key Stage 4 although the time allocation at Key Stage 3 is less than average. Another improvement since the last inspection is in the provision for religious education, where statutory requirements are now met at Key Stages 3 and 4. It is also included in the personal, citizenship and health education course for all sixth-form students accredited by the ASDAN certificate of personal effectiveness. All Key Stage 3 students study dance, but the provision for this and PE does not ensure that all students in the sixth-form are engaged in physical activity or that all in Key Stages 3 and 4 have two hours per week. However, many students participate in the optional physical activities after school. These include specialist coaching to help them reach competition standard and preparation for a dance performance at Sadler's Wells. The recent change to a staggered short lunch break leaves no opportunity for optional lunchtime activities. Nevertheless, this provides an increased length of time after school for a good range of extra-curricular activities that are well attended.

The alternative provision to GCSE and A level courses has improved since the last inspection and the school has rightly identified it as an area for continued development. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are new to the country with little English is variable, with some constrained through the lack of clear mapping of provision and thorough record keeping.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Good quality pastoral care and support safeguards students' welfare and promotes their personal development and well-being. The effective pastoral teams know students well and systems enable students to contribute to each other's support successfully. Safeguarding requirements are met thoroughly and efficiently, and procedures for child protection are robust. Vulnerable students are well cared for, with support through mentoring and coaching, and links with outside agencies. Nevertheless, the high turnover in staff in the special educational needs faculty has contributed to a lack of carefully kept records that chart students' progress against their targets. Guidance provided at each transition stage is good and supplemented by informative activities.

Learning co-ordinators and subject departments use data suitably to direct support for students at risk of underachieving, in particular prior to national assessments. There is variation between the systems, and in the focus of students' individual targets on subject specific aspects for improvement, that impedes effectiveness. The school has recognised the need for greater coherence, with more frequent monitoring of progress and greater consistency in setting targets for students who are new to the country. This year it is introducing a new software system to underpin this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, who is passionate about comprehensive education, has provided good leadership supported by an effective leadership team and good governance. She has restructured her senior leadership team well to ensure that they focus on teaching and learning, secure accountability, manage the school effectively and work to shape the future for Copthall School. However, there is a lack of co-ordinated conceptualisation, planning and recording of support and progress across inclusion. Her vision for combining the pastoral with the academic has set a clear direction for the school. It is beginning to have an impact at middle management level where data are used more effectively to set targets in order to raise standards. This has contributed to the higher standards at Key Stage 4 and improved progress in the sixth form.

The school has improved its systems to support self-evaluation and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. They involve middle managers, are accurate and have contributed to improvement, but there is room for greater consistency across all departments. Parents, students and governors have been involved in the school's self-review and the school development plan but there is a perception amongst some parents and students that they were not sufficiently consulted about changes to the school day and the removal of many lockers. There are plans to review the effectiveness of these new initiatives, which have contributed to a calm environment at break and lunch times although they have caused some students to carry heavy bags. Governors are actively integrated into the work of the school, for example through their links with departments and the student council, but some statutory requirements are not fully met.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

13 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Copthall School, London, NW7 2EP

Thank you very much for all of the helpful information you provided for us when we visited your school. We found that it is a good school in which you make good progress and reach above average standards by the end of Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, you make outstanding progress to reach exceptionally high standards.

Your personal development is good. You told us that you enjoyed coming to school and felt safe from bullying and racism. You all contribute to the community, such as through assemblies or business activities, and the school council feels that it makes an impact. Some of you wanted to be consulted more about changes to the day and access to lockers. Most of you behave well but there are occasions when behaviour is not so good. Attendance is below average and is not improving fast enough.

Staff provide good support for your welfare. They use a variety of systems for setting you targets and keeping track of your progress. Some marking of your work gives you clear guidance on how to improve but some does not. In the sixth form, this assessment and tracking is more consistent and frequent, and helps you to make better progress. Teaching is good. Some of you who need extra help are supported well in lessons but this is not always the case because there are some gaps in plans and records. The business and languages specialist status offers you a good range of courses and activities. The headteacher and school leaders know well the school's strengths and areas for development, and have helped it to improve.

We have asked the school to:

- improve how your progress is checked against your targets
- give you more consistent guidance on how to improve your work
- improve planning, recording and support for those of you who need extra help
- increase attendance.

You can help out by ensuring you attend regularly and checking how well you are making progress towards your targets. My best wishes to you for success in the future and in helping your school to become even better.

Gill Close

Her Majesty's Inspector