

Chorlton High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105569
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	308889
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1496
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Val Stevens
Headteacher	Mr Andy Park
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2005
School address	Nell Lane Chorlton-cum-Hardy Manchester M21 7SL
Telephone number	0161 882 1150
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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

Chorlton High School is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school. It is a specialist performing arts college with many more boys than girls. The school is situated in a relatively affluent part of Manchester, although students are drawn from a wide range of socio-economic groupings from around the city. Overall attainment on entry is improving and is just below the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, although decreasing, remains well above the national average. Fewer than half the students are White British with a wide range of minority ethnic groups represented, a high proportion of whom have English as their second language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is very close to the national average. The majority of these students have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The number of students who join or leave during the year is slightly above the national average. The school has gained a number of awards including Training School Status, Sportsmark, Artsmark Gold and the International Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Chorlton High School has many emerging strengths but also areas which continue to need further development. As a result, its overall effectiveness is currently judged to be satisfactory.

Driven by the shared vision of a dynamic headteacher and motivated senior leadership team, the school is undergoing a period of change and transition, although this metamorphosis is not yet complete. There is a strong communal desire to ensure that the school is not only a centre of excellence but also a hub of the community. Governors are supportive but also challenge when results have not met targets. Middle managers and subject leaders are being given greater responsibility to shape policy and develop the curriculum. Many are rising to the occasion and are beginning to influence improvements in classroom practice; a minority have had a more limited impact.

Management is aware of what needs to be done. Significant changes have been introduced over the last two years which have reshaped the character of the school. Structures have been established to enable the school to move forward. Measures to improve the monitoring of teaching and learning and the use of assessment data, identified as issues in the previous inspection, have been set in place. Most students, and a majority of parents, comment positively about these changes. However, some aspects continue to need further work. Standards remain lower than they should be and students make only satisfactory progress. Poor literacy, particularly writing skills, hold many students back. Behaviour, although improving, remains an issue with some individuals and can disrupt the learning of others. However, many students comment positively that lessons are improving and becoming more interesting, although there remain inconsistencies across subjects and classes.

Students enjoy coming to school and are proud of their successes. They are pleased with the many opportunities offered to exhibit their artistic talents whether it is in front of their neighbours and parents at the Chorlton Arts Festival or to highlight the plight of refugees in their emotive production of *Fugee* at The Lowry Theatre. Many have dreams they hope to turn into a reality. They benefit from the wide range of sporting and enrichment opportunities the school offers and enjoy the many opportunities to meet people from distant places and cultures. Students appreciate the time and effort made to enable them to participate in these opportunities. The majority thrive on responsibility and enjoy participating in the cultural and sporting life of the school. Student voice provides them with many opportunities to change their school and community for the better.

Students prefer those lessons which allow them to utilise and develop their practical skills. They are less keen when they are expected to listen passively and are provided with limited opportunities to contribute. They learn better when teachers engage them in interesting activities and in those lessons, behaviour is good. There remain inconsistencies across classes in the marking and presentation of students' work and in clarifying what they need to do to improve.

The school is clearly benefiting from the changes being implemented. There is an impatience to move forward quickly but also an understanding that effective change also takes time. This school has clearly embarked on the journey towards excellence but is aware that this road is long and winding. Most parents and students are supportive of the changes and appreciative of the efforts being made on their, and their children's, behalf. As one parent remarked, 'I could

have sent my child elsewhere, but I chose Chorlton because this school is very open to change and adapts to meet the needs of my child.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards across the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good, engages students, and improves behaviour in lessons.
- Develop marking as a tool to enhance learning and improve presentation.
- Improve the use of literacy across the curriculum to support learning and raise standards.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school having attained standards that are broadly in line with national averages. They make overall satisfactory progress as they move through the school and leave at age 16 with GCSE results that are also in line with the national averages.

In 2007, the results obtained in National Curriculum tests by students in Year 9 were below average in each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the progress made being below expectations based on their prior attainment in primary schools. Boys, particularly those of lower or middle ability, performed less well than the girls and underachieved. Considerable improvements were made in 2008 and progress was satisfactory. A particularly impressive feature was the performance in English where the proportion of students improving by two levels was well above the national average.

GCSE results in 2007 reflected satisfactory progress, although results varied across subjects. For instance, standards reached in French, business studies and dance were above national averages whereas the proportions of high grades recorded in English and mathematics were below the national averages. There were no significant differences across gender, ability or ethnicity groups. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made similar satisfactory progress. The overall picture remained the same in 2008, although there was again variability across subjects. A very positive feature, however, was the above average number of A and A* grades recorded in French, mathematics and the sciences.

Inspection evidence indicates that the initiatives taken to raise standards are having a positive impact. Tracking procedures, together with the number of early entries in English and mathematics lead to confidence that the targets set for the current cohort will be met. The school's specialism has been used effectively to improve standards in performing arts subjects. Specialist school targets were met in 2007 and have yet to be confirmed for 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The good personal development and well-being of the students results from the strong care and support provided by the school. Most students are happy to be in school and say that they enjoy coming to school. Attendance figures are above average as a result of consistent

monitoring and there are few unauthorised absences. However, not all students arrive to lessons punctually.

Students feel safe in school and know who to talk to about any concerns. They also speak positively about the school's confidential electronic system which enables them to voice concerns about any issues anonymously. They say all concerns are dealt with promptly and effectively. Behaviour around the school is generally good but there is a small minority of students whose behaviour needs to improve.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They get on well with each other and most students show respect for others. Their spiritual development, appreciation of cultural diversity and understanding of different faiths and beliefs are promoted well through assemblies, life skills and across the curriculum. The life skills programme also has had a significant impact on promoting healthy lifestyles. Participation in the many extra-curricular activities is high and an increasing number of students are cycling and walking to school as a result of the school travel plan.

The school council and the student voice focus groups enable students to express their views. They feel that their opinions are listened to and have been involved in major decisions including curriculum reviews, appointments of new staff, the change of food options and the revamping of the girls' toilets. There is a good contribution to the community by an engaged majority of students. School productions are well attended by the wider community, reflecting the high profile the school has as a performing arts college. The school plays a key role in the organisation of the annual Chorlton Arts Festival as well in productions throughout Greater Manchester. Students are also involved in a variety of projects with partner schools. Contribution to the wider community has been recently extended by international projects across the curriculum and in fundraising activities. Extended learning experiences and enterprise events have developed students' workplace skills. The proportion of students who continue to further education, training and employment is high.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school judges the quality of teaching and learning to be good. Inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. What happens in classrooms is regularly monitored. The school recognises that outcomes in terms of student learning do not always reflect the quality of teaching. This is partly due to staff absence and variations in the effectiveness of subject leaders. Students told inspectors that the quality of teaching is improving, confirming the effectiveness of much of the school's training policy and the increasing use of coaching to ensure greater interaction in lessons. The support given to newly qualified teachers is outstanding.

The most effective teaching challenges students, captures and holds their interest and shows through in the high quality of their written work. In such lessons, the relationships between students and teacher are very positive. Students enjoy being challenged. Their learning is driven by the high expectations made of them. For example, the learning in a transition Year 8 class was driven by pace and by challenge. The pace was driven by a giant egg-timer which provided a visual reference point to remind students of time implications, motivating their concentration. The challenge drove the learning of this group of vulnerable pupils so that they rose to the teacher's high expectations of them and they made outstanding progress. Most teachers

understand the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The provision made for them enables them to make similar progress to their peers. The school's role as a training institution has led to some improvements in teaching and learning, especially where pupils are more practically involved.

Despite clear evidence that the quality of teaching and learning is improving, inconsistencies between subjects and between teachers remain. Inspectors saw too many lessons where the teacher did too much of the work and other lessons where planning to meet the varying needs of all students, especially in mixed ability and banded classes, was insufficient. In a small number of these classes, classroom management was not entirely effective in dealing with the challenging behaviour of a minority of pupils.

Assessment in many subject areas is secure. Processes are becoming embedded and provide teachers with a wealth of information helping them identify the progress of students better. Students generally know how well they are doing, but are less secure in understanding how to improve. Day-to-day marking, in most cases, is inconsistent and does not indicate to students clearly, or frequently enough how they can make better progress in their work. Presentation of work also varies greatly from class to class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, meets statutory requirements and the quality and variety of extra-curricular provision are good. Students' school experiences are enriched by a wide range of after-school activities, particularly in drama, sport and music. Visits to places of educational interest, including residential visits, are welcomed by students who say these bring their 'learning to life'. Older students appreciate the wider range of choices available to them in their options. The introduction of BTEC courses in Year 9 are not only popular, but have also resulted in creditable successes in music, drama, art and dance. These are spurring students on to take on more challenging work in the arts, which gives them the opportunity to further raise their standards by the time they leave school. They relish the chance to be creative and more involved in their learning and many include the performing arts among their favourite subjects.

Currently, some students' choices are limited because there are few options available for them to study vocational subjects. The 'Learning to Learn' curriculum has recently been introduced and is taught through humanities in Year 7 as well as some intervention band groups further up the school. Currently, this programme is not sufficiently well developed to ensure the progression of learning in the subjects alongside the skills of 'learning' itself.

Provision is made in most subjects to promote basic skills but the development of writing across the curriculum remains weak. The development of students' literacy skills is not built sufficiently enough into all teachers' planning to support improvements in students' writing. The curriculum supports students' personal development, particularly their social and cultural development, well. Arrangements with primary schools are a significant strength and a transition curriculum based around 'Kensuke's Kingdom' prepares students well for their entry to secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's 'student support service' is an integral part of the school system for the support and care of students. It encompasses teams of dedicated and highly committed staff who are much valued by the students. Those who are in need of additional help are identified early and

appropriate support strategies are employed, which are enhanced by well established links with external agencies. Learning mentors run programmes for underachievers and for vulnerable students who are also offered a 'safe-haven' environment during break and lunchtimes. Trained teaching assistants provide opportunities for students to improve their creative and social skills in the Therapeutic Inclusion (Thinc) room.

A diverse range of personalised packages are arranged to address the needs of some students and enable them to continue with their education. Parents and students speak highly of the effective transition programme enhanced by Arts College partnerships and curricular links. Students also work with Year 6 pupils as transition buddies and global buddies.

Careers provision has been improved through dedicated careers areas and the work of Connexions. Students receive good guidance to make informed choices in individual interviews and the well attended 'Options Fair'. Post 16 providers, including schools, colleges, work providers and the armed forces, contribute to assemblies, after school drop-in sessions and the Year 11 annual post 16 event. Use of data to track students' progress against their targets has been refined. Underachieving students are identified and supported by mentoring and coaching programmes which match individual needs. Arrangements for safeguarding students' welfare and safety are secure. The school's health and safety and risk assessments are fully in place and monitored.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. During the past 18 months, the school has gone through a period of rapid reorganisation. A new headteacher undertook a full evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A clear vision for the future emerged with structures in place to achieve the intended outcomes. A focus of development planning is the improvement of leadership at all levels. Middle managers are increasingly held to account. As a result, the school knows itself well. In response to the previous inspection report, the quality of teaching is now assessed more comprehensively. A comprehensive programme of professional development exists for the benefit of all staff. Much of the work is on-going within clearly defined timescales. Evidence supports the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning is improving but it is too soon to see the impact of the school's new direction on standards and achievement. Some inconsistencies in the capability of middle managers persist.

The school accurately identifies the need to use its specialist status more effectively to raise standards across the school. To this end, subject leaders are becoming more involved in planning lessons in which pupils are more actively involved and stimulated in their learning. This has already had an impact in some subjects through raising pupils' confidence and improving their speaking and listening skills.

The school discharges its duty to promote race, gender and disability equality well. Consequently, this multicultural school operates smoothly, providing a safe refuge for its students. The impact of specialist arts status has boosted curricular and out of hours learning and involved the local community in its work. The school is working hard to develop the global dimension of community cohesion through its international status. However, teaching and the curriculum do not currently enable all subjects to make a greater contribution to this aspect.

The headteacher keeps the governors well informed. Consequently, they are able to support the school. They set challenging targets and have adopted the role of critical friends. A 'Scrutiny Committee' of governors oversees the school's self-evaluation process. The school is very well organised. In two years, a significant budget deficit has been turned into a surplus. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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
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**

Inspection of Chorlton High School, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, M21 7SL

This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your school to inspect the quality of the education you are experiencing. The inspectors particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking to you. We found what you told us to be very interesting and informative.

Most of you told us you enjoyed coming to school and had noticed how things were improving in terms of behaviour and better lessons. The inspectors agree, but also feel that one or two areas still need to improve and you, too, can play a part in making this happen. You are rightly proud of your achievements, but results in examinations could be even better. In order to do this, we have asked your teachers to focus on making your lessons more challenging and involving you more practically in your learning. They are also going to ensure they provide you with clearer information when marking your work to inform you better of what you must do to improve. You also need to play your part by ensuring that you concentrate in lessons; work hard at improving the quality of your presentation and writing, in particular, and do not let the small minority of disruptive pupils spoil your life chances.

In speaking with you we found that many of you had real ambitions to do well and move on into further education. You enjoy the many opportunities to show off your talents in the performing arts at prestigious locations such as the Bridgewater Hall and the Lowry Theatre. Many of you have dreams to further your artistic talents into careers. You have had opportunities to meet many positive role models from acclaimed writers and artists to musicians and sportspeople. Some of your older students even remember meeting and performing for local legends the Bee Gees when they opened the Maurice Gibb Recording Studio in your school. These experiences have given you food for thought and something to aim for.

You enjoy challenges and we are sure that you will respond positively to ensure that Chorlton High School continues on its journey towards excellence. We are sure you will give your teachers all the help and support they need to build on the strong foundations that are being established by Mr Park and his team.