

Castle Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107784
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309505
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Marianne Young HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	865
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr B Nicholson
Headteacher	Mr AD Pugh
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Richard Thorpe Avenue Crowlees Road Mirfield West Yorkshire WF14 9PH
Telephone number	01924 520500
Fax number	01924 520504

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Inspection number	309505

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team consisting of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Castle Hall School is a slightly smaller than average secondary school and is situated in the prosperous commuter town of Mirfield between Huddersfield and Dewsbury. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below that found nationally, but the proportion of students with a statement of special education need is slightly above average. The majority of students are of White British heritage with the next largest group comprising students from Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students who have a language other than English as their first language is in line with national figures. Very few students are entitled to free school meals. Apart from Year 9, boys outnumber girls by a considerable margin in all year groups. Since 1995, the school has held languages specialist status and was re-awarded the International Schools Award in 2007. The Financial Management Standard, Investors in People and the Football Association Charter Standard have also been awarded to the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Castle Hall School is a popular, over subscribed specialist Language College which provides its students with a satisfactory education. Students enjoy coming to school as shown by their above average attendance and their eagerness to be involved in many of the wide range of after-school clubs and trips to places of interest. Students socialise well with each other and some take on positions of responsibility with enthusiasm, for example, as prefects or members of the school council. They display high levels of self-confidence, especially when talking to visitors. These characteristics are clear evidence of students' good personal development, which is a result of the high levels of pastoral care afforded to them.

Despite standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 being above average, the progress made by some groups of students has been inadequate given their favourable starting points in Year 7. Headline figures of five A* to C grades have improved since the last inspection, but more students should reach the highest grades in many subjects. However, since 2006, for those students in Year 11, and more recently for the rest of the school population, the more rigorous tracking of their progress enables the school to demonstrate that progress is now satisfactory. The headteacher is not complacent and knows that the pace of change needs to be more rapid. Senior managers, supported by the curriculum area leaders, are monitoring progress more rigorously and ensuring that the systems in place are evaluated on a regular basis.

The specialist language status has brought several benefits to the school, despite falling short of its planned targets in 2007, particularly in German. The language department works closely with most of its main feeder primary schools, as well as some outside the immediate area. Younger students enjoy a positive experience of a foreign language and are well prepared for the transition to a more intense programme of language acquisition. Fast tracking to GCSE examination has enabled some students to experience the language to a higher level than usual in Years 10 and 11 and to take up a third language or to experience Japanese. However, there is a down-side and the amount of curriculum time devoted to languages means that it restricts the number of optional free choices for the students.

Strategies to improve teaching and learning, a key focus of the school's work, have not been fully embraced by all teachers. This results in the variability seen during the inspection. Satisfactory teaching predominates. There is a general lack of challenge especially for the more able students with targets set for these students in some subjects in Years 7, 8 and 9 but not in all. The good use of information and communication technology by many teachers effectively promotes learning, enlivens lessons and adds to students' independence, enjoyment and understanding.

The headteacher, supported by staff and governors, has established a caring environment in which students develop as confident young people. Self-evaluation shows that whilst senior leaders know where there are examples of good and often very innovative work, this is not shared sufficiently well or used as a model of good practice. They have been less successful in monitoring the impact of the procedures that have been put in place since the previous inspection and some of these are still to impact fully on students' progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the good practice of tracking and monitoring student progress that exists in some areas is used consistently throughout the school.

- All lessons must meet the needs of all students but particularly for those who are more able.
- Undertake to evaluate and monitor the impact of the school's equality policies on the experiences of young people and staff

A small proportion of 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 with standards that are above average. By the age of 16 overall standards are above average, although this headline figure masks considerable variation in achievement by some groups of students and between subjects. Between 2004 and 2006, students at the end of Year 9 made inadequate progress, especially in English, when judged against their attainment on entry to the school. Un-validated test results for 2007 indicate that progress for these students has improved in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and is now satisfactory. This is because more rigorous monitoring, together with changes to the provision within the English department, has managed to turn around a relatively long period of underachievement.

At Key Stage 4 students make up ground lost in the earlier key stage. This is particularly evident in English. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, rose by 9% in 2007 and is above average. There was a similar significant rise in the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades, but, as in previous years, too few students reached the highest grades in several subjects. Boys performed better than girls and those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar satisfactory progress to that of their peers. The comprehensive tracking system now in place is allowing the school to identify students in danger of underperforming more quickly and put in place appropriate support and guidance.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say that they enjoy being part of the school. It is a calm and well-ordered community despite some limitations of space, especially in the corridors. Behaviour around the school and in many lessons is good, however, some students and a few of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, raised concerns about the time it takes for minor problems to be resolved. Many students make good use of the school catering service which provides a range of healthy options on its menu. The school is working towards the Healthy Schools Award and knows that it now needs to give students opportunity to take part in more physical education. Students make good use of the 'bullying box' which enables them to express their concerns anonymously. Some reported to inspectors that staff are always on hand should they need to talk to someone about personal concerns. The school council meets regularly and its members feel that their views are valued. Recently, students made a very original positive contribution to teaching in the school by producing a video entitled 'What makes a good lesson?' Additionally, recycling monitors patrol the school raising the students' awareness of this important issue.

There are various opportunities for students to develop their awareness of other cultures through the school's language specialism and for example, the 'rap against racism' project on an 'Alternative Curriculum Day'. These days make a positive contribution to students' spiritual,

moral, social and cultural education. Students enjoy the interactive assemblies which reinforce important topics. The house system is very effective in promoting competitive events in sport, music and quizzes, enhancing teamwork and relationships with students in other years, as well as strengthening confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Some learning is good, expectations are high, pace is brisk and students are interested and involved in their lessons. However, there is too much that is merely adequate and not sufficient to lead to good achievement or ensure that all students achieve their potential. Relationships in the classroom are generally positive. Whilst behaviour is often good and helps effective learning, a few students report that the length of time taken by some teachers to establish order sometimes slows their rate of progress. This was summed up in the comment, 'we (students) lose concentration and it wastes our time if teachers spend ages telling people off'. Many of the satisfactory lessons are characterised by a slower pace and work that is less well suited to students' varying abilities. Lesson planning is only just beginning to draw systematically on available assessment information to prepare for and meet individual needs effectively. As a result, not all students are sufficiently challenged. Marking is too variable. Advice to students on what they need to do or how to get better, too often including comments such as, 'revise more effectively' or, 'pay attention'. The school's own monitoring identifies this issue as a concern. Homework is also too variable in frequency and quality.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced. As a specialist language college, the school offers all students the opportunity to study two modern foreign languages, from a rotating choice of French, German and Spanish. Two single 50 minute periods of physical education support promotion of a healthy lifestyle, but the time needed for students to change means that the total involvement in activities falls short of the normally accepted two hours. The current Key Stage 4 curriculum does not yet fully cater for the needs of all students. The 'pathways' system allows some flexibility and a small minority of students have the opportunity to choose off-site courses more suitable to their needs. The specialist language stipulations, however, do restrict the number of optional free choices. Students do not find this a problem, but it has hindered the desired introduction of vocational and applied GCSE courses, because of the time involved in their delivery. The fact that two-thirds of students study two languages to GCSE is a major attraction of the school. Progression routes are clearly established with a very high proportion of students continuing their education after the age of sixteen.

The curriculum enrichment provided in the school is a major strength. There is a wide range of sporting and musical activities, supported by clubs in most subjects offering help and extending skills. Students can also participate in annual trips to the countries whose languages they study.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff are aware of individual students' needs and provide good pastoral support, where necessary, to promote the good personal development and safety of students. For example, there are

good links with external agencies to provide 'drop-in' sessions at lunch-time so that students have access to good quality, impartial advice. Good systems are in place to identify potential risks in activities and ensure the safety and health of students. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their needs carefully assessed and appropriate support is provided. Progress of these students and modifications to their support plans are regularly reviewed. All parents are kept informed of the progress their children are making. The school has now introduced a system of identifying 'minimum acceptable grades,' (MAGs), for all students. In Years 10 and 11 this system has been established longer and there is some innovative work to motivate students and provide interventions to raise their achievement. This is starting to impact on the numbers of students reaching higher than their MAGs and achieving above their potential. Some subjects such as design technology and art and design are also updating students' achievement grades each time an assessment is made and using this to motivate students to do better. Other subject areas are less advanced in their use of targets and practice is generally inconsistent across the school. It is too early to identify their impact, but the good practice established for older students provides a good model for further development of the school's guidance system.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher gives clear leadership and he is well supported by the senior team. Together they recognise that the pace of change for the school since the previous inspection has not been quick enough. The headteacher has led the considerable work that is being done locally to establish links with nearby schools, especially through the curriculum work undertaken by members of the languages department. This has raised the profile of the school amongst parents. Those parents who responded to their questionnaire were fully supportive of the school. Curriculum area leaders are beginning to share good practice and to evaluate the provision and effectiveness of their subject areas. However, there is still too much inconsistency in the implementation of school policies and procedures. Good practice exists but this is not being shared sufficiently across the school especially where the tracking and monitoring of progress is concerned. The school provides satisfactory value for money and financial management. The governing body are hard working and bring a range of skills to support the development of the school. They are becoming more challenging and evaluative of the school's performance. However, they are aware that there are deficiencies to meet national requirements to complete, monitor and evaluate their equality policies. This must be addressed urgently. Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The senior team demonstrates the capacity to bring about the further improvements required.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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?	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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?	No
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**

Thank you for making me and my colleagues welcome when we came to inspect your school. We were impressed by your good manners and behaviour. It is a shame that sometimes a few of you do not behave as well as you should in lessons. Those of you we talked to told us that you enjoy school and appreciate the varied opportunities you can take part in out of lesson time. I very much enjoyed my brief visit to the singing rehearsal and was most impressed by the three part unaccompanied singing. It was lovely to see so many of you, especially boys and members of staff, enjoying performing together.

Your test and examination results vary quite considerably. Some students and subjects perform well, but this is not always the case. We know that Mr Pugh wants all students and subjects to do equally well. So we have asked that some improvements are made. In order for these to be successful you must all play your part.

- Make sure that all lessons have work that is hard enough for all of you - tell your teachers if it is too easy!
- Ensure that you all work with your teachers to check the progress you are making - so you need to understand your targets and how to get better.

We have also asked the senior leaders and governors especially to evaluate and monitor the impact of some school policies, especially those concerned with equality.

I hope you all enjoy the rest of the term and the holiday (when it arrives!).