

John Colet School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110491
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310331
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	990
6th form	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Keith Wilkinson
Headteacher	Mrs Christine McIntock
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Wharf Road Wendover Aylesbury HP22 6HF
Telephone number	01296 623348
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is an average sized school in a county where there is selection. Consequently, when pupils transfer from primary school their overall attainment is broadly average, but the proportion of high ability pupils is much lower. The majority of its students are from two small towns, Wendover and Aston Clinton, with the rest from the local rural community. The school is an area of very low deprivation and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups, and of students who speak English as an additional language, are below average. The school has recently applied for specialist status in humanities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

John Colet School provides good care and support, a broad curriculum, and satisfactory education. Most students enjoy school, and feel safe, and many parents agree that the school enables 'children to feel valued, and to gain confidence and self-esteem'.

The new senior leadership team provides a strong strategic direction to improve the quality of education in the school. Its vision for the future is shared and supported by all staff, and many new initiatives have recently been implemented. Although most managers have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of concern, the rigour of actions for improvement at curriculum level is inconsistent. New systems have yet to be fully established, and are only beginning to have impact.

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and governing body have responded to a rapidly growing financial deficit by undertaking a complete restructuring of the staffing and management roles. This resulted in a new senior leadership team, and a revised middle leadership structure, with improved clarity of roles and accountability for improvements in student achievement. It also resulted in a financial budget that is now in surplus, enabling the school to focus on improvement.

Many staff are new to the school, new to teaching, or have new roles and responsibilities. The school has also experienced recent difficulties in recruiting teachers in some areas. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Whilst there is some good and outstanding teaching, it is inconsistent across subjects. Although the collection of assessment information is now good, insufficient use is made of it to plan lessons, or to set appropriate targets for students. In a few lessons, teaching is uninspiring, students lose concentration and the behaviour of a minority disrupts learning. As a result, the academic standards reached by students have remained broadly average. All groups of students make better progress in Years 7 to 9 than they do in their GCSE examinations, and the progress that they make overall is satisfactory. Senior managers are aware that there is too much teaching that is no more than satisfactory, and are taking appropriate actions to effect improvements.

Students appreciate the broad curriculum with options that meet their needs, whatever their abilities. Throughout the school there is an extensive range of cultural, sporting, and personal development activities, that enhances students' life at school. Parents and students speak favourably about the commitment of staff in providing good care and support to their children throughout their school career; as a result, the personal development of students is also good. As they progress through the school, students' contribution to the community increases. They speak enthusiastically about providing support in local primary schools, communities for the elderly, and with charity events.

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. The increased emphasis on systematic monitoring and clearer accountability at all management levels supports the school's good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The quality of provision in the sixth form is satisfactory with some good features. Standards are broadly average, and achievement is satisfactory. Most students achieve the grades expected of them, based on their previous GCSE performance, but there is some variation between

subjects. There is a good range of academic courses provided in the sixth form, and in partnership with other local schools. Plans are advanced to extend the vocational provision in collaboration with a local further education college. Students enjoy a broad range of curriculum enrichment, and extra-curricular activities, which contribute to their good personal development.

Students' attitude to work is good. They communicate confidently with adults and relationships are good. Many opportunities are available for students to take responsibility, and to play an active part in their community, such as being mentors to younger students, and undertaking community service. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although there are some examples of very good lessons. However, some poor accommodation prevents students from fully enjoying their sixth form experience.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The school recognises that there is a need to develop further the strategies and procedures to raise standards. The sixth form is a popular choice. Guidance for progression after the sixth form is good, and most students go on to either higher education or employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to improve attainment in GCSE examinations, and in the sixth form.
- Improve the consistency and sharpness in the way middle managers monitor performance, and set clear targets and actions to raise student achievement.
- Ensure that all staff use assessment information effectively to plan for the individual needs of students.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. The attainment of students when they enter the school in Year 7 is around the national average, but the proportion with high standards on entry is lower than average. In Years 7 to 9 students make good progress, especially boys. Achievement in English is high; however, students perform relatively less well in science.

In years 10 and 11, students' achievement is satisfactory compared with their starting points. Boys make slightly better progress than girls, although girls reach higher standards, as is also seen nationally. Although attainment of the higher grades at GCSE is below the national average, the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A* to G is significantly above average. However, there is some variation in performance between subjects. For example, a lower proportion of students attain high grades in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), or science, than they do in other subjects, such as the modern foreign languages.

The school systematically analyses the performance of specific groups of students and provides effective support to ensure that there is little variation between the achievement of different groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. Most students enjoy school and have a positive attitude in lessons. Attendance is above average, and unauthorised absence has been reduced to well below the national average. Behaviour is good around the school, but less than good in some lessons. Students feel safe at school. They are conscious of their own and others' safety, as demonstrated well in a physical education lesson where students looked after themselves, and each other, when using the trampoline. Bullying is rare, and when it does occur is tackled swiftly and effectively. Students in all years speak enthusiastically of the 'buddy system'.

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and developed well in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, and other school activities, such as trips to the war graves. They are considerate to others, and there are good relationships between students and staff. The school has a vibrant school council, which provides an effective 'student voice' to school leaders.

Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. They welcome the school's move towards the provision of healthy food, despite the poor dining facilities, and enjoy an impressive range of physical activities. The preparation and support that students receive to develop work-related skills provide a satisfactory foundation for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The new lesson monitoring scheme accurately identifies areas for improvement, but improvement strategies have not yet had time to impact on students' progress. Students report on the good relationships they have with teachers, and how that helps them to enjoy school. The better lessons move at a brisk pace, and students make good progress; teachers plan lessons with interesting and challenging activities to meet the needs of all students. Students have good opportunities to learn independently, and to evaluate the quality of their work.

However, as one parent rightly commented, 'When teaching is good, progress is good, but this is not consistent throughout the school'. Insufficient use is made of assessment data to plan lessons and set targets appropriate to the students' differing needs. The setting and marking of homework are inconsistent, and do not ensure that students know how they can improve. In a few lessons, where the pace is slow, students lose concentration, and a minority sometimes disrupt the work of others. Classroom assistants are well aware of students' particular needs, and provide good support in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of its students. Collaboration with local schools and colleges has introduced greater flexibility, particularly in vocational options, for students in Years 10 and 11. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including many sporting and musical opportunities, is provided across the school. The school has been particularly successful in providing different physical activities for students who do not like mainstream school sports. Participation is high and does much to encourage teamwork and enjoyment of school.

There is a broad range of trips and visits, at both home and abroad, to complement and support students' learning and enjoyment. An impressive range of enrichment activities meets the needs, and challenges higher ability learners. With a high level of involvement, many talented students have the valuable opportunity to be involved in public performances.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Many parents comment on how the school nurtures a 'safe and caring environment in which students mature and gain confidence'. Procedures for safeguarding children are well established and statutory checks are in place. Students appreciate the way that all staff are approachable and helpful. Many parents agree that when concerns have arisen, 'the school dealt with them promptly and sympathetically, solving the problems before they turned into major issues'. There is good support for students who need help with their learning, or with personal issues, and for those who are at risk of exclusion. The school uses effective links with external welfare organisations when necessary.

There are very effective procedures to ensure a smooth transition from primary schools, and to give students sound advice as they move on to the next stages of their education. Many parents commented how the guidance and support arrangements helped their children settle very quickly in Year 7. Students across the school appreciate the high level of support they receive from the well trained mentors from the sixth form. The school has recently introduced effective systems to track and assess students' progress to ensure that those at risk of underachieving are identified and supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with many good aspects. The headteacher sets a clear strategic direction for developing and improving the work of the school. With good support from the senior leadership team, she has succeeded in establishing a strong and collective sense of purpose among staff. There is a clear focus in the school on improvement, and inclusion, to ensure that no groups of students are disadvantaged.

Effective self-evaluation has led to the identification of areas for development. The school is well aware of how it is performing and has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Most middle managers show a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their areas of responsibility, but not all have developed good strategies for improvement. Access to accurate data is improving, but some managers are unsure about how to use data for setting measurable targets, at both curriculum, and student, levels to improve student achievement.

With a high proportion of new staff, and managers with new responsibilities, many staff are receiving professional development. External organisations, such as the local authority, are providing expertise in many aspects of quality improvement. Governors are well informed. They provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders in helping the school to improve. Since the last inspection, effective management of resources has removed a financial deficit, and the school has made good progress.

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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?	3	3
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	2

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?	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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	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	3	2

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?	2	2

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	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	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	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

28 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of John Colet School, Aylesbury, HP22 6HF

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff, and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the caring and supportive environment, and your good relationships with teachers, meant that you enjoyed school and felt safe there. We judged your school to be a very caring school that is providing you with a satisfactory education. We were particularly impressed by:

- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of its staff
- your personal development due to the very good support that you receive and the school's emphasis on positive attitudes and healthy lifestyles
- the courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development.

To make your school even better we have recommended that:

- it raises the overall quality of teaching and learning to enable you to improve your results at GCSE, and in your A and AS level examinations
- managers improve the way they check on how you are doing so that they can produce clear actions and targets to help you to make even better progress
- staff regularly monitor your performance to ensure that lessons are planned for your individual needs.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Nigel Fletcher

Her Majesty's Inspector