

The Netherhall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110873
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE LA
Inspection number	310448
Inspection date	4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1350
6th form	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Stewart
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline McKenney
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
School address	Queen Edith's Way Cambridge CB1 8NN
Telephone number	01223 242931
Fax number	01223 410473

Age group	11–18
Inspection date	4 March 2008
Inspection number	310448

© Crown copyright 2008

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the sixth form, standards and achievement in 2007, the school's evaluation of teaching and learning and its strategies for improving attendance. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations, assessment data, documentation and meetings with key staff, representatives of the governing body and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school enjoys a spacious site on the southern fringe of Cambridge and serves an urban catchment with lower-than-average levels of social disadvantage. The students come from a very diverse range of social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. The majority are White British, although almost one third are from other ethnic backgrounds, a proportion that is higher than found nationally. The largest single minority is from other White backgrounds, mostly from Eastern Europe, with significant numbers of students of Indian, Chinese or Bangladeshi heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average. Forty different languages are spoken. The school is adjusting to increasingly high levels of mobility, with comparatively large numbers of students arriving or leaving during the course of the school year. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The school has dual specialisms in Sport and as a Training School. Additionally, art is the lead subject and the school is the Cambridge City and East of England hub Artsmark centre for the arts. The school is larger than average and is located on a split site, although plans are in place to rebuild the lower school adjacent to the upper school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Netherhall School provides a good education for its students. It has worked hard to establish a strongly inclusive ethos where students from diverse backgrounds are able to settle quickly and happily. One parent summed up the views of many others in writing: 'Netherhall is an exciting, vibrant school with lots to offer.' This combination of vibrancy and well-being means that the vast majority of students enjoy school and are able to thrive socially and academically. Students achieve well and their personal development is good so that, by the time that they leave school, they are mature young adults who are very employable and also well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life.

Since the last inspection, achievement has been good across all key stages, including the sixth form. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations are above national average figures in most respects. When they start in Year 7 the standards of the students' work are broadly in line with age-related expectations. Students make good progress as they move through the school. Although there is no significant difference, the progress of White British students is generally not as good as those from other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who gained at least five A*-C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was significantly above the national figure in 2007. Nonetheless, the school did not meet its specialist school targets in GCSE physical education and there was a considerable dip in overall achievement because a small but significant number of students performed poorly. The school has analysed these results and has strengthened key aspects of its provision. School data indicates that it is on course to exceed last year's GCSE results in 2008.

Students make good progress because teaching is good and because the curriculum serves their needs and aspirations well. The curriculum enables students to succeed academically and provides excellent opportunities for personal development and wider enrichment, for example in sport, drama and the arts. Education in citizenship is good. The school recognises the need to provide good opportunities and progression routes for all learners and continuously seeks to tailor its provision to meet their individual needs. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who speak English as an additional language is particularly effective, so that their progress is at least as good as and often better than that of their peers. Although the overall quality of teaching is good, the pace and quality of learning varies quite widely within and between different lessons. The students make most rapid progress when lessons are sharply focused on specific outcomes that different individuals should achieve, and when learning activities are carefully planned and skilfully managed to ensure that all students make accelerated progress. In these lessons, assessment data is well used to ensure that work is matched to the abilities of different students and that the students themselves have a clear understanding of what they should achieve and how they can improve. However, the use of assessment is inconsistent and sometimes weak.

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. They feel safe and are confident that the school listens to their views and acts in response to their concerns. In general, behaviour is good, particularly around the school, and students have positive attitudes to learning, although this does vary according to the quality of teaching. Students respond positively to the school's strong promotion of healthy lifestyles. Participation rates in the wide range of extra-curricular activities are impressive. Students are given countless opportunities to assume responsibility and to develop their leadership skills within and beyond the school community. A significant number participate in volunteer activities and Duke of Edinburgh

Award and in other ways such as fund-raising for charity. Their involvement makes an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community.

The school takes good care of students and supports them very well. Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and well understood. Although a few parental questionnaire returns were critical of aspects of the school's provision, parents' responses were particularly positive about the way that the school supports their children and responds promptly to any issues raised. Excellent transition arrangements into Year 7 and the sixth form, and for new arrivals, contribute positively to the students' sense of ease and well-being. The school is attentive to all aspects of students' welfare, but is less consistent in providing high quality academic guidance. Good use is made of assessment data to analyse performance and prioritise improvement at whole-school level, but the use of assessment and target setting varies widely across the school. Although some marking is exemplary, there is too much variability, so that students are not always clear what they could achieve and how they can improve their work.

Attendance is satisfactory. However, it remains stubbornly below the national average because, despite the school's best efforts, the attendance of a small number of students is unacceptably low. Recent strategies to improve this picture have met with increasing success.

Leadership and management are good. The governing body supports the school very effectively. Governors are well informed and are effective in holding the school to account. Parents recognise the improvements brought about by the principal, particularly in improving communication and in strengthening the school's ethos and climate. Under her calm and assured leadership, the school is demonstrating good capacity to improve. It is continuously seeking ways to increase its effectiveness and is careful to engage parents, staff, students and the wider community whenever possible. Procedures for monitoring the school's performance and evaluating its progress are systematic and increasingly rigorous. Students appreciate their own involvement in this and feel that they are able to influence the school's work and development. The school's specialisms make a strong and positive impact on its provision and outcomes. The sports specialism is central to the students' personal development and their wider community contribution; art makes an outstanding contribution because it is a key subject in driving standards and developing enrichment opportunities; and the training school specialism promotes productive self-evaluation and effective improvement. In addition, the school makes very effective use of strong business and academic partnerships at local and regional levels to enhance its provision and promote its development. The principal, senior leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school's further development based on high achievement for all and strong community cohesion. The leadership team has done exceptionally well to balance the large deficit budget and to broker the planned new building development. The school has addressed the issues from the last inspection. It provides good value for money and is well positioned to consolidate its recent improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education for its students. Many of the sixth formers come from other local schools, whereas a significant number of the Year 11 students from Netherhall choose to go on to sixth form colleges. Transition arrangements are excellent, and students speak positively about the strongly supportive ethos in the sixth form. Students enter with attainment that is below average overall and make good progress. Standards have risen since the last inspection. Results at A level in 2007 were broadly in line with those seen nationally.

Given the students' starting points, this represents good achievement. Good teaching, careful assessment and rigorous tracking underpin the good progress that students of all abilities make.

Students' personal development is good. They appreciate the high quality support and guidance that they receive and take advantage of the many opportunities offered to them. Sixth-form students make a very good contribution to the school and wider community. They work well with younger students through programmes such as the reading scheme. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good. Strategic planning and day-to-day management ensure that the needs and aspirations of the students are well met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more systematic use of assessment, marking and target setting to guide more sharply and consistently what students need to do to improve.
- Improve the attendance of those students with unacceptably high levels of absence so that they are able to achieve well.

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	16-19
---	----------------	-------

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	2

Achievement and standards

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 March 2008

Dear students

Inspection of The Netherhall School, Cambridge, CB1 8NN

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by your friendly welcome and the way that you articulated your views. Your considered opinions, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the school.

We agree that Netherhall is a good school and were particularly impressed with:

- the way that the school's strongly inclusive ethos creates such a cohesive community where adults and students work well together
- the good progress that you make and the standards that you achieve
- your good behaviour, particularly around the school, and the way that you look after your environment
- the excellent range of opportunities, including extra-curricular activities, that you participate in
- the outstanding contributions that you make to the school and the wider community through your different leadership roles and many volunteering activities.

You and your parents raised some issues that I have discussed with the school. It was clear from the parental questionnaires that communication between the school and home has improved recently and that, in general, the school is quick to respond to and resolve any issues that arise. Nonetheless there are important areas that can improve, and we have asked the school to focus specifically on:

- making more systematic use of assessment, marking and target-setting in lessons so that you are clear about what you should achieve and how you can improve
- improving attendance, particularly for those of you whose absences are affecting your progress and personal development.

The school is ambitious for the future, and the planned new building is an exciting development. We recognise that you are given some say in the way that the school makes improvements and it is important that you continue to play your part.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker Her Majesty's Inspector