

Poole High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113907
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	311427
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Bradley Simmons HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	12–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1345
6th form	306
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	W L Upton
Headteacher	J A Short
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Harbin Campus Wimborne Road Poole BH15 2BW
Telephone number	01202 666988
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Age group	12-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors, accompanied by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Poole High is a larger than average, popular and oversubscribed secondary school. It serves students whose parents choose a non-denominational comprehensive education rather than the selective or specialist options available in the area. The school draws students from most primary schools within the Poole conurbation. Students come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds but, in the round, the context in which the school works is favourable. At around 6%, the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average. A very small minority of students are from minority ethnic groups. Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly below the national average, particularly in literacy. Just over 13% of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Poole High is a satisfactory school. It has some strong features. Sixth form provision is good, and the school is a safe place for students to be. The great majority of parents believe that their children enjoy school, and recently arrived students, for example those from Eastern Europe, feel welcome.

Senior leaders share clarity about what needs to be done to improve the school further, and to this end, they have introduced a range of strategies to tackle the weaknesses they have identified. Whilst ensuring that students make sound progress, these initiatives are not making as great an impact as they might. In the case of the school's key drive to teach literacy across the curriculum, there is a lack of sharp guidance to departments on the key skills they should be reinforcing. This means that this well intentioned initiative is not yet leading to students, especially those who need to catch up during Key Stage 3, demonstrating the level of higher order writing skills of which many are capable. In addition, evidence demonstrates that, whilst some staff and departments accord this work due weight, others are less sharp in their understanding and thus implementation of it.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, and some teaching sparkles. For example, in a very strong Year 8 English lesson, the teacher held the students' attention highly effectively with excellent exposition, interlaced with quick and well targeted questions matched to students' individual levels of ability. These strategies successfully encouraged students to think, speak and justify their opinions. As a result, all students made good progress. In less strong lessons, teachers often tend to talk at students for long periods, and do not consistently use a wide range of teaching strategies to hold students' attention and involve them as active participants in their learning. In such lessons, the progress made by students is held at satisfactory. Marking is not consistently evaluative or detailed enough to guide students towards the next steps in learning.

Senior leaders are accurate in their judgements concerning teaching quality. This notwithstanding, the school's monitoring evidence shows that, at times, there is insufficient regular evaluation of the impact of teaching on learning, particularly that of different groups of students and students of varying abilities.

In combination, the factors described above, together with a satisfactory and developing curriculum, underpin both the strengths and weaknesses in achievement and standards. The rate of progress made by students in both Key Stages 3 and 4 has slowed somewhat over the last three years, yet it is still broadly in line with national averages overall. Over time, students have made good progress in mathematics, but their progress in English has been weaker, although still broadly satisfactory. The school is to be commended that, in 2007, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more higher grade passes at GCSE improved on the 2006 results at a faster rate than that seen nationally. However, GCSE standards remain below the current national average.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. The high numbers of students who cycle to school, combined with the school's laudable provision of over two hours of physical education per week, underpin students' good understanding of healthy lifestyles. The school has made a sound impact on reducing exclusions but the rate of these remains high.

Senior leaders and governors' actions to date demonstrate a satisfactory capacity to turn the school's sound foundations into consistently good provision for students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards at AS and A level are broadly average, and above average for vocational subjects. Students make good progress overall and do particularly well on vocational courses. Retention rates are good and there are increasing numbers of students entering higher education, following the pathways of the subjects studied in school.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Progress data over time and the school's monitoring records confirm this. Students respond well when teachers involve them fully in their learning. They know their target and current grades, and are well informed through written and oral feedback of what they need to do to improve. Very effective intervention support has led to cases of students improving their attitudes, grades and future chances. Students are able to combine vocational and academic options and to study additional subjects, such as archaeology, in partner schools. Despite the good guidance in the one-to-one interviews about post-16 choices, many students are determined to follow an academic rather than a more vocational route. Students take part in a wide range of enrichment opportunities such as the Health Fair, the millennium volunteers' scheme and community service for all.

Students develop into socially mature young people, taking responsibility for their own well-being and learning. They enjoy sixth form life very much, so attendance is good. Punctuality has improved because of the more rigorous monitoring procedures introduced by the head of sixth form. Students feel secure in, and well supported by, their school. They speak highly of the level of additional support they receive from their teachers and the monitoring from their tutors. Students are rightly particularly appreciative of the good advice they receive on both higher education and the world of work.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form and her team have worked hard to engage parents in school life. As a result, attendance at sixth form parents' evenings is very high. In common with the main school, the monitoring of teaching and learning in the sixth form is not regular enough or focused sufficiently on learning and achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that guidance to improve literacy across the curriculum is sharpened and effectively implemented, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Improve systems of self-evaluation so that leaders at all levels focus consistently on the impact of provision.
- Extend work in progress to reduce exclusions.

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: 2

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Students enter the school with slightly lower attainment levels than typically expected for 12-year-olds. The rate of progress made by successive cohorts as they have moved through the school has slowed year on year from a high point in 2005. Nonetheless, progress made by the 2007 cohort of Year 11 students during

their time within the main school was broadly satisfactory. Over the past three years, students have made strong progress in mathematics; progress in English has been less strong, although satisfactory overall. The weaker progress students make in English is reflected in standards at the end of Year 11. Here, whilst students' attainment in mathematics has been stronger than the national average, in English it has been below.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students generally enjoy their education. They speak positively about the support they receive in school, especially those students in the sixth form and those for whom English is an additional language. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Relationships between staff and students are generally positive and respectful. Students' attendance overall has improved slightly in the last two years as a result of the systems in place to monitor and respond quickly to concerns. However, for a small minority, attendance is still unsatisfactory. Most students behave sensibly in lessons and make satisfactory progress. In a minority of lessons, often where there is less effective teaching, some immature behaviour and attitudes persist. The exclusion rate, whilst remaining high, has fallen significantly this year due to the effectiveness of the school's staged response to inappropriate behaviour and development of its 'internal seclusion unit'. Students generally act safely and say that they feel safe at school. They are confident that, should any bullying occur, staff will deal with it effectively. Through the school council, students make a useful contribution to their school community. However, the future economic success of some students is potentially hampered by their weaker literacy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The depth of students' learning and their degree of enjoyment varies according to the extent to which they are engaged and interested during lessons. When teachers plan varied and relevant activities, pitched at an appropriate level, students rise to the challenge. During the best lessons, teachers' support is clearly focused on individual students' needs. The beginning of lessons and resources are stimulating and often imaginative. Teachers use a wide variety of questioning techniques to probe and challenge students' thinking, and assess and deepen their learning.

During weaker lessons, however, teachers are not focused sufficiently on students' learning. Teachers' plans specify what students of different abilities will do, but not consistently what they will learn. Some teachers talk for long periods, missing opportunities for students to interact, ask for clarification, or to explore and develop their ideas. Too many questions rely on volunteers for answers; thus some students choose to remain passive and lack the challenge they need to make more than satisfactory progress.

The school is focusing on improving the effectiveness of marking, so that it has greater impact on moving learning forwards. This initiative is beginning to have some impact on learning but it is not yet consistent within and across departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory. Opportunities for students to follow vocational and work-related courses are increasing, providing greater levels of interest and challenge for a number of students. Collaboration with external providers is strengthening provision for work-related and vocational routes, and clarifying pathways for Year 10 and Year 11 students to post-16 study.

The academic streams in each year group are designed to cater for the most able students. However, the school has not carried out a systematic evaluation of the impact of the scheme to determine whether these students are stretched, and thus make more than satisfactory progress. Curricular arrangements for students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities, and for recent arrivals, take adequate account of individual needs in helping these students to integrate effectively. The Virtual Learning Environment is beginning to be used effectively to extend provision and help students in their learning.

The school has correctly identified literacy as a key area for development across the curriculum, but explicit teaching of literacy skills is not fully evident within and across subjects. Some staff and departments do not fully grasp the urgency of this initiative for Key Stage 3 students.

A wide range of clubs and enrichment activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, culture club, trips, sports teams and revision classes motivate students, build confidence, enhance personal development and support achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Staff are committed to the well-being of students at the school and parents particularly appreciate the house system which provides a central point of contact for academic and pastoral matters. Systems for safeguarding students and ensuring their health and safety are fully in place. A small number of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire understandably complained about the poor condition of the students' toilets.

Academic guidance is variable. Marking is usually workmanlike but does not consistently address students' targets in a manner which enables them to move on. Conversely in an outstanding Year 9 geography lesson, the teacher effectively raised all students' awareness of how to make further progress to the next level through specific guidance. Potentially vulnerable students, such as those for whom English is an additional language, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are identified quickly and effectively and have suitable provision made for them in order that their needs are satisfactorily met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher is due to retire at the end of the autumn term 2008. He provides dedicated leadership and a high degree of commitment to the young people at this school. GCSE performance has almost trebled during his tenure.

The school has a sound understanding of its strengths and of those areas that require attention. Senior leaders have introduced a range of sensible strategies to tackle the latter. The school's initiative to developing literacy across the curriculum is timely in order to raise standards in all subjects. However, evaluation systems are not sufficiently developed to ensure that the initiative has the maximum possible impact on students' learning. Similarly, monitoring of teaching and learning focuses too little on the impact of teaching on the learning of different groups.

Governors are committed to the school's improvement and understand clearly the questions they must begin to ask to check the school's continuing improvement.

Senior leaders demonstrate a clear capacity and appetite for their task of continuing to ensure that Poole High moves surely along the path to becoming a good school.

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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	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?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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 the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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	2
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	2
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?	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

22 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Poole High School, Poole BH15 2HW

Thank you to those of you who gave up time to talk to us when we inspected your school recently. Your comments were most helpful. We found that Poole High is a satisfactory school with some strong areas. You can be proud that GCSE results improved faster than the national rate in 2007. Over the past three years the school has seen some of the best GCSE results in its history.

The sixth form is good, and here you make good progress and attain A-level results that are broadly average. In the main school, the progress made by successive Year 11 groups over the past three years has slowed, but was nevertheless still in line with the national average in 2007. Overall, in the main school, the progress you make in mathematics is strong, but it is below average in English. Senior leaders have recognised this and are working to improve your literacy skills across the curriculum. This is a sensible initiative, but some departments would benefit from more guidance so that they reinforce your literacy skills more effectively. You need to key in to this literacy initiative during lessons, and to take responsibility for bolstering your own progress, for example by putting maximum effort into your own subject targets and more generally, for example, by reading at home.

You told us you feel safe at school, and a large majority of your parents say that you enjoy being at Poole High. Those of you who have recently joined the school, for example from Eastern Europe, feel welcome and well integrated in the life of the school.

Teaching is satisfactory overall but, within this, we saw some very strong teaching which really inspired you to learn. We have asked the school to be more evaluative in the checks they make to ensure that leaders concentrate on the impact of the school's provision (teaching, curriculum initiatives and so on) on your learning.

The school has reduced the number of exclusions significantly this year, but the rate is still high, and we want staff to continue this work. The school is committed to your academic and personal success. Many of you realise that you have a major part to play in this, and perhaps, by your example, could help to support others at risk of exclusion.

I wish you every success in the future.

Bradley Simmons Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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Her Majesty's Inspector