

Patcham High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114608
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	311658
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1026
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Stewart
Headteacher	Paula Sargent
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2006
School address	Ladies Mile Road Brighton BN1 8PB
Telephone number	01273 503908
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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

Patcham High School draws its students from the more socially deprived areas of the city. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. The school has associate training school status and was awarded specialist status for media arts in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Patcham High School provides students with a satisfactory standard of education. Whilst the majority of students join the school with standards that are broadly average, a significant number are below. In 2007, standards at the end of Year 11 were well below average. However, the school has been working hard to address a legacy of underachievement. Students are making satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. In addition, students' work and recent assessment information show that standards are rising and achievement is on the right side of satisfactory. Consequently, in accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The headteacher has a clear view of the challenges facing the school. She has worked tirelessly and effectively to increase the capacity of leadership across the school to drive up standards. New appointments to the senior leadership team and other positions are shifting the pace of improvement from satisfactory to good. This is clearly demonstrated in stronger systems for tracking students' progress and monitoring the work of the school, and the development of a much more relevant and varied curriculum. There is still variation in the quality of leadership at some levels. This is reflected in the unevenness of students' performance across subjects and inconsistency in the implementation of policies and procedures. Self-evaluation, largely driven by the senior leadership team, is honest, accurate and clearly focused on students' achievement. Middle leaders are being involved in self-evaluation, with more work to do. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory.

The quality of teaching and learning varies across the school but overall it is satisfactory. The proportion of good and outstanding practice is increasing but some teachers have been slow to realise the urgency of embracing the new approaches which are helping students to make better progress. Students enjoy learning when teaching is well matched to their needs and requires them to make an active contribution and think for themselves. Where students are not challenged appropriately, given opportunities to apply new skills independently and carried along by a snappy pace, they make slower progress.

Generally, the ethos of the school is characterised by positive relationships. Most students feel cared for and the majority of parents are supportive of the school. Students' attitudes are improving and behaviour is satisfactory. However, a small minority of students do not respond appropriately to expectations; this is echoed in comments from some parents and students, particularly the younger ones, who are concerned about this inconsiderate behaviour. Satisfactory personal development ensures that most students mature as responsible citizens aware of the relationship between their own actions and the well-being of the wider community.

As a result of the improved curriculum which now offers a good range of courses, students are more motivated and their enjoyment of learning is growing. Specialist status in media arts is helping to develop students' confidence and self-belief as well as raising standards. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Support for students with additional needs is well coordinated and increasingly effective. However, assessment information is not always used well either to pinpoint when students are ready to take the next step in their learning or help them understand how to improve their work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement and standards by further increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, and ensuring all teachers quickly embrace the methods that are accelerating students' progress.
- Develop the capacity of middle leaders to evaluate the work of their teams, with a sharp focus on students' achievement and the consistent implementation of policies and procedures.
- Make sure all teachers and learning support staff use assessment information to match learning to students' needs precisely.

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

In 2007, the proportion of students achieving five higher-grade GCSEs increased. GCSE results show that students are performing better in communication studies, dance, design and technology, English literature, music, languages, physical education and sociology compared to other subjects. Provisional Year 9 results indicate a slight rise in the percentage of students achieving National Curriculum Level 5 and above in mathematics, a bigger increase in science but a dip in English. The school was much closer to achieving its targets than in 2006.

Some pockets of underachievement are still evident across different groups of students, notably in the performance of middle- and lower-ability girls.

The school has introduced powerful new assessment systems which enable staff to review students' progress, to identify underachievement and to set appropriate and challenging targets for future learning. Evidence from very recent data and lesson observations shows that the standard of students' work is rising and the school is likely to achieve or exceed its targets. Well-thought-out intervention strategies have been put in place to help those students who are failing to make the progress expected of them.

Observation of lessons has confirmed students are making satisfactory progress overall. Most students know their target levels or grades, and increasing numbers know how to reach them because teachers are involving them in the process of analysis and review. The impact of this work still varies between subjects and teachers, however, and students do not always have enough opportunities to reflect on their progress towards lesson objectives and personal targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students enjoy coming to school and their enjoyment of learning is shown by the high numbers who participate in the programme of enrichment activities on offer to them. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. In most lessons, students work well with each other and with their teachers. They are developing their social skills through their life skills lessons, theme days and lessons which involve them actively in their learning. Beyond lessons, students benefit from a variety of cultural and spiritual activities such as links with schools in Ghana and France, educational visits and speakers such as poets and artists. Opportunities for leadership and responsibility are popular, with some students achieving Duke

of Edinburgh bronze, silver and gold awards and others leading days for primary schools as Junior Sports Leaders.

Attendance is satisfactory. The school uses an increasingly effective range of strategies to monitor, target and support poor attenders. As a result, there are encouraging signs of improvement, with this year's figures close to the national average. In addition, the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. Occasionally, some behaviour in corridors and around the school is boisterous and upsetting to younger students.

Students participate in their year and school councils and they have appreciated being consulted on issues such as uniform design, the school logo and the new style journal. Most feel they are listened to and have made a difference to their school. Students develop skills for life through work experience. The expanding vocational curriculum also gives good options to acquire entrepreneurial skills. These opportunities, combined with improving progress in key academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, ensure students' preparation for their future lives is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school is working hard to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Systems for the monitoring of students' progress against targets have recently been significantly enhanced. Staff are now provided with robust and easily usable data on students' progress and areas of underachievement. The appointment of a dedicated member of staff to work with staff on assessment for learning, the development of an innovative coaching system and the use of regular 'walk-through' monitoring of lessons provide further evidence of the school's resolve to improve the quality of provision. However, the good and outstanding teaching and learning seen in the school, whilst increasing, is not yet shared widely enough and so the quality of lessons is inconsistent.

Teachers have good subject knowledge, but not all lessons have clear learning objectives or outcomes, and the standard of lesson planning varies between subjects. Where good or outstanding teaching occurs, it is characterised by the use of challenging questions, activities which call for independent and collaborative working, practical tasks, a brisk pace and the tight use of time in order to concentrate thinking. During these lessons the students demonstrate a clear interest in the subject and the teachers actively engage students in assessing their own and others' learning. In lessons where students' progress is only satisfactory, it is because teachers allow students to be passive or attempt lengthy explanations which fail to match the needs of different learners. Homework is not set regularly in all subjects and is not always sufficiently focused on consolidating and applying learning. Marking varies widely and some books are scruffy and poorly presented.

Working relationships in lessons are usually positive, although there is some low-level disruption. The recent appointment of behaviour assistants is reducing the incidence of this. Support for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties is good and based on close teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, these students are now making at least satisfactory progress. Students who are identified as gifted and talented are increasingly challenged with suitable extension work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is becoming a strength of the school. The breadth of subjects in Years 10 and 11 has improved since the last inspection and is contributing to students' improving behaviour and attendance. In September 2007, six new pathways were introduced to reflect students' interests and aptitudes. Students can choose vocational courses such as hairdressing or construction at a college combined with work experience, or take a course such as sports, health and social care or leisure and tourism in school. Students also select from a good range of interesting science courses. Reflecting the school's specialism, GCSE media studies is increasingly popular and applied art and art textiles have been introduced. In Year 10, the school is piloting the delivery of functional skills and has prepared some very good materials.

Following a review of Year 7 provision, a small group of students is taught several subjects by one teacher to make the transition to secondary school easier. This is working well; students enjoy and benefit from the increased continuity in their learning. Fortnightly life skills lessons in Years 7 and 9 help students to understand relationships and how to work together to get the most out of school life. The school is rightly considering extending this programme to all years and having weekly lessons. Other elements of the personal, social, health and citizenship programme are delivered through six theme days during the year.

Many extra-curricular activities, trips and outings take place to broaden students' horizons. These include sporting activities, visits to the Globe theatre, fieldwork, trips abroad and Duke of Edinburgh outings.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are fully in place and monitored robustly. The school is particularly diligent about supporting looked-after children and monitoring their progress and care. Representatives from many agencies meet regularly to discuss looked-after children, other vulnerable students or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The special educational needs co-ordinator and inclusion manager rightly focus on enabling students to succeed in mainstream lessons. Life skills lessons give students in Years 7 and 9 an opportunity to discuss their worries or concerns. Professionals from outside agencies help to educate children about important issues such as health, crime and youth welfare. Most students feel there is someone to turn to in school if they have problems but a few think their concerns are not acted on quickly enough.

Students receive helpful advice about their future education and career options. What they do not yet receive consistently are clear indications about the levels or grades they are working at, what they should aim to achieve and what they need to do to get there.

A small minority of parents are concerned about how long it takes the school to respond to any queries they have.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a clear vision for improvement combined with the determination and skill to take the school forward. Quite rightly, one of her first priorities has been to strengthen senior leadership. Following some key recent appointments, the senior team is giving clear direction to the work of the school and the pace of improvement is increasing. Good whole-school systems are being put in place with urgency and tenacity. Students' progress is now tracked within subjects and across subjects, but there is still inconsistency in the effectiveness of target setting and more to do in establishing common approaches to improving learning.

The establishment of rigorous line management procedures is making teachers accountable for students' progress. Teamwork is becoming a strength and staff welcome opportunities to take responsibility. Good opportunities for professional development link to the school improvement plan as well as to the individual needs of staff.

Governance is satisfactory and improving. Governors are passionately committed to the school, know it well and support its work. Recent appointments and reorganisation have increased capacity to drive improvement and influence the strategic direction of the school. Governors work closely with the senior leadership team and monitor the work of the school through their links with departments and year groups.

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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	3

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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	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

30 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Patcham High School, Brighton BN1 8PB

Thank you for talking to us so honestly about your school and the progress you are making. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

We found that your school provides a satisfactory education and no longer requires a notice to improve. You have contributed to this achievement by being much more focused on learning. Most of you enjoy school and appreciate the wide range of extra activities available to you. You have a good choice of subjects to study in Key Stage 4. This helps to keep you interested in learning and is improving your attendance. Relationships are generally positive. You get on well with each other and with staff most of the time. You take the work of the school council seriously and appreciate being consulted on issues such as uniform design, the school logo and the new style journal. Behaviour is improving but some of you get fed up with some students who do not always behave considerately.

You are making better progress in lessons, especially where the work is closely matched to your needs; where it is not, your progress slows down. The headteacher and governors are determined to keep on improving the school. Recently, some new staff have been appointed to positions of leadership; they are also helping to improve things. We have asked for the following things to be done:

- ensure all teachers use the methods that are helping you to make good progress
- help heads of subjects and years to review the work of their teams and check they are sticking to school policies and focused on how well you are doing
- develop the expertise of teachers and learning support staff in using assessment information to match learning to your needs.

You can help too by being clear about what you need to do to improve and working hard to achieve your targets. Thank you again for your help with the inspection and for welcoming us to your school.

With very best wishes for the future,

Jacqueline White HMI

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