

Stroud High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115753
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312055
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	639
6th form	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqui Phillips
Headteacher	Timothy Withers
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Beards Lane Cainscross Road Stroud GL5 4HF
Telephone number	01453 764441
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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 of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stroud High School accepts girls from a very wide geographical area, which extends in some cases beyond Gloucestershire, and from more than 60 partner primary schools. Students' attainment on entry is well above average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is very low, as is the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most the girls are from White British backgrounds. The sixth form, Downfield, is shared with a neighbouring boys' grammar school, also accepting students from other schools at 16+, and works within the Stroud Post-16 Consortium. The school has had science and mathematics specialist status since 2003. It has recently gained a Becta ICT mark, an International School Award, the Financial Management Standard FMSiS, and Healthy Schools status. A new headteacher took up post in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stroud High is a good school with some outstanding features. It is a school in which girls thrive and is very popular with parents and heavily oversubscribed. One parent described the school as a place 'where it is cool to excel'. The standards achieved by many of the students are exceptional, and amongst the highest in the country. Relative to their well above average attainment on entry to the school, students' achievement is judged as good, rather than as outstanding, as there are some subjects in which students could achieve even higher standards. The focus on high standards is very well balanced by the outstanding attention given to the personal development of students. They have rich and varied opportunities that enable them to develop into confident, articulate young women, ready to take their place in society. Students undertake impressive fundraising for a range of charities, and benefit from very good links with schools abroad that have led to the International School award. A good example of the outcome of the extensive fundraising is the opening of a school in the Philippines and its continued financial support. There are other equally exciting links with schools in Africa, India and Russia. These links help students to appreciate what they can do to give something back and help others who are less fortunate.

Students' good academic achievement and outstanding personal development are the result of the dedication of a skilled teaching staff that is well led and managed. Teachers really care for the students and want them to do well, supporting those who need extra help. Recent changes to the management of progress meetings across the school, for example, ensure that all students know how they are getting on and what they need to do to improve. Teaching is good overall, with some recognised by the parents as 'inspiring'. The curriculum is outstanding throughout the school and sixth form. As a result of good teaching and an excellent curriculum, the students enjoy learning and want to come to school. Their attendance is well above national averages and their behaviour exemplary.

Leadership and management are good. Self-evaluation procedures have become a part of all managers' accountabilities. Increased use of data is beginning to improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation and the school is aware that there remain things to do. Senior leaders know that although teaching is good, the consistency of some aspects, such as the marking of students' work, requires improvement, particularly in Key Stage 3. Senior leaders are also aware of the need to devise a whole-school system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and sixth form. At the moment, strategic planning is not sharply enough focused on the few key priorities that will help to ensure that students achieve equally well in all subjects. The recently appointed headteacher, supported by an able leadership team and new head of sixth form, have a good capacity to implement these points for improvement. There have been tremendous improvements since the previous inspection, which are evident in the impressive new accommodation, raised standards in Key Stage 3 mathematics, and the good leadership and management of the joint sixth form.

The Science and Mathematics College status has had a positive impact on the school. Whole-school standards are on a rising trend. Standards have improved in mathematics and science, and particularly in chemistry, in the sixth form. Impressive links with a local manufacturing company have provided sixth form students with a real experience of work through a project to test waterproofing materials for tennis balls. The project has led to a change in the manufacturing process at the company, who continue to set different challenges for the students each year. Another example of the impact of the specialist status is the use

of interactive whiteboards, pioneered in the specialist subjects, which has now become established in all subjects across the school. The school extranet has also become a significant development, enabling students and their parents to access information, communicate with teachers, work on their school-based files, and access homework and study guides at home.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The wisdom of the school in creating a joint sixth form with the neighbouring boys' grammar school has resulted in an expansion of provision for the students. This jointly owned and managed establishment has grown to over 520 students, with its own leadership. This model of co-owned sixth form provision has some complex challenges for leadership. The attainment of Stroud High girls is higher than that of the sixth form in general. In 2007, AS and A2 results were both outstanding, well above national averages, although achievement was only good, not outstanding, due to the variation between subjects.

Attendance is only satisfactory, at 88% recorded for Year 12 and a far lower figure recorded for Year 13. There are issues of recording attendance in this complex sixth form. Only a minority of students drop out of the sixth form and retention rates, at 95%, are excellent. Students who join the sixth form feel supported by their subject tutors. Pastoral care continues to be provided by Stroud High school staff and this allows the students to be nurtured in a familiar environment. The students feel safe and well supported by this arrangement. The Stroud Post-16 Consortium of local schools, in which the school plays a key role, allows students access to an excellent curriculum provision.

The leadership of the director of the sixth form is good. He has developed leadership tools that can enable the sixth form to improve but remains constrained by some management issues, such as the control of the monitoring and accountability between the two grammar schools.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that strategic planning is sharply focused on a few key priorities that will improve consistency throughout the school and enable students to achieve equally well in all subjects
- devise a robust system to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school and sixth form
- improve the consistency of marking throughout the school, particularly in Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are very high. In 2007, as in previous years, all students achieved 5A*– C grades, and all but two students achieved this benchmark including Mathematics and English at A* – C grade. An impressive 70% achieved 5A*– A. These figures are examples of the outstanding attainment, well above national averages.

Whilst those who gain entry to the school are of high academic ability, the school is able to demonstrate that students make good progress from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 11. In general, students leave the school demonstrating higher academic performance in relation to their age than when they joined. However, this good progress is not uniform across the age range. At Key Stage 3, students achieve very high standards although there is only satisfactory progress in the core subjects of English and science. In mathematics, on the other hand, there

is a year-on-year improvement in achievement, reflecting the impact of the specialist school status. New systems of target-setting and the monitoring of students' progress six times a year are identifying any instances of under-performance. It is, however, too early to identify the full impact of these initiatives.

In the sixth form, standards are also very high at AS and A2 level. In 2007, the pass rate was over 99% in A2 examinations and 96% at AS level. 72% of A2 passes were awarded A or B grades, and 55% at AS level, and both figures are well above national averages. However, there is some difference in achievement between subjects and the school is starting to address this by a more rigorous system of monitoring. Subjects such as chemistry, sociology, ICT and politics have evidence of students achieving beyond challenging targets. Other subjects do not show this same level of achievement for students. The weakest results are in subjects that were seen as enrichment courses, such as general studies and critical thinking. The school is not complacent about this identified underachievement in some subjects and has a strong determination to make achievement outstanding overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Students behave in an exemplary way in lessons and around the school. They greatly enjoy being at Stroud High and would enthusiastically recommend it to others. The very high rate of attendance and almost non-existent need for serious sanctions is testament enough to the outstanding ethos. Students want to take part in the full life of the school, including the wide range of sports and other extra-curricular activities.

Girls appreciate the personal guidance on careers and future studies. They develop a wide view of their role in the world and an excitement and optimism about their futures. The great majority of students move on from the main school to the sixth form, indicating a high level of self-confidence and trust in their school. Students are well prepared for their future lives.

Students feel the school is a safe and caring environment. They are considerate and move around the site sensibly. There are many opportunities for them to make positive contributions to the school community and to local primary schools. Many older students are trained as mentors to help other students and those new to the school value the guidance and friendship of 'buddies'. Through the elected school council, form councils, numerous student-run events and independent class activities, students of all ages contribute very well. Students say that they feel thankful to be in this school, and that they are extremely well supported. 'I feel lucky to be here,' said one Year 11 student. 'There is such variety here,' said another, 'I really feel that they have got all they can out of me.'

Students respond very positively to the school's active promotion of safe and healthy lifestyles, and they benefit from the well-structured teaching on sex education and the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse. The lunch menus feature healthy, though sometimes costly, choices, and there is an excellent level of awareness of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Knowledgeable, well-informed teachers transmit enthusiasm for their subjects, stimulating students' interest and imagination. These strengths result in very good relationships and highly positive learning attitudes. Students feel confident to ask questions that deepen their understanding or seek clarification when they feel unsure about something. Teachers enjoy the challenges posed by these able students, with many lessons well organised to stretch thinking and develop good levels of independence. Most, but not all, lessons include planned opportunities to extend the learning of the most able students.

Students' under-achievement in some subjects has been the result of weaker aspects of teaching which have now largely been rectified. Recently developed assessment systems, for example, enable staff to ensure that expectations of standards of work match students' potential. These systems also help teachers to intervene if students seem to be working below their capabilities. By Year 11, pupils are very clear about their standards and progress. However, younger students are less clear about how well they are doing because they do not receive consistently well-focused information, such as thorough marking, about how to improve. Students value opportunities to identify for themselves how to develop their work, but not all teaching offers these opportunities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

In all years, the school provides an outstanding curriculum, carefully crafted to keep students' academic and personal development well balanced. Students' own subject preferences for Years 10 and 11 are accommodated successfully and, in collaboration with its partners, the curriculum offered to the sixth form is very extensive. Although the curriculum provides primarily for an academically capable population, partnerships enable students to pursue other avenues in other local schools if they wish, such as a BTEC Performing Arts course.

New ICT resources, such as interactive whiteboards acquired using monies available through specialist school funding, have improved learning. The many gifted and talented students benefit from numerous extension opportunities and the few with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good support and so achieve as well as others. Extra-curricular opportunities are excellent, with sports activities providing many opportunities to keep fit and healthy. An outstanding range of visitors and visits, many reinforcing the curriculum's excellent international dimension, add significantly to students' experience in school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is proud of the excellent personal support and guidance that the students receive. Students and their parents value the caring ethos. Even before they start in Year 7, the school extranet initiative, 'Stroud High Chicks,' is highly valued by parents and students and enables

Year 6 girls to log questions and seek information, so that their transition to high school is smooth.

Tutors and year leaders make a major contribution to the students' personal guidance. The school has now developed systems of monitoring the progress of all students in such a way that they can be set realistic overall targets in each subject. Students meet their tutors individually to review the progress noted in their school reports and determine how best to make further advances.

The monitoring systems allow staff to identify students who may be experiencing difficulties. As a result, all students, including those who may be vulnerable, receive strong and effective help. Students identified with specific skills or barriers to learning receive timely support. Improved use of data now ensures that there are no specific groups of girls who are making slower progress than others. Counselling, 'buddies' and peer mentors are available for anyone going through a difficult emotional or personal time. The school uses external agencies very well to meet students' welfare needs. The required procedures for health and safety and for child protection are fully in place. The provision for careers and further education advice is excellent, with parents invited to play an important part in this process.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed headteacher leads with purpose, diplomacy and determination. He has taken stock of the school and its stage of development and has successfully focused the strong leadership team with renewed energy. Together they form a potent team committed to school improvement and meeting the challenging targets they set for the students.

Middle managers are also impressive. The regular cycle of examination analysis, departmental reviews and self-evaluation processes has ensured that subject and faculty leaders are much more accountable now for the standards achieved in their areas. They are well supported by the senior leadership team and are encouraged in their professional development to pursue nationally accredited middle management training.

There remain challenges facing management at all levels. Students' work is inconsistently marked, especially at Key Stage 3. There is also a lack of a robust whole-school system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching throughout the school, which is why inconsistencies remain. As a result, self-evaluation does not sufficiently inform strategic planning with the few key drivers to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and ensure that students do equally well in all subjects.

Governance is good. The governing body meets regularly and is actively involved in the life of the school. Governors hold senior leaders to account for the standards students achieve. Stakeholders and other professionals involved with the school are very positive about their contacts with Stroud High and the exceptional personal qualities the girls develop. One commented, 'Stroud High is an effective and approachable partner'. Another observed that the school has 'a holistic approach to the development of young people'. The school values the support of parents who are very positive about all it has to offer their daughters, both

academically and in developing their whole persona. One commented that the school develops 'a culture of responsibility' in their daughters.

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?	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?	1	1
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	1	1
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	2
The attendance of learners	1	3
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 November 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Stroud High School, Stroud, GL5 4HF

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when the inspection team visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you, observing the school and sixth form in action and looking at your work. You must be very proud to go to such a good school. I thought you would like to know the outcomes of the inspection.

- You all work very hard and achieve exceptional standards in your exams.
- Your parents think you go to an exceptional school and we agree.
- There are many opportunities for you to get involved in charity work, help younger students and take on other leadership roles. These opportunities contribute a good deal to your personal development.
- Your teachers really work hard for you and want you all to do well.
- The headteacher and other leaders in the school are doing a good job.
- The way the school supports your personal development is outstanding. You develop into confident, articulate young women.
- The curriculum is interesting and varied with very many trips and enrichment opportunities.
- The sixth form is good. You value the wide range of courses provided, and the opportunity to learn in the joint sixth form.

To make the school even better, we have made the following suggestions to your headteacher as the main areas to work on next:

- ensure that whole-school development planning is sharply focused on a few key priorities to enable you to achieve equally well in all subjects
- devise a robust system to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school and sixth form
- improve the marking of your work throughout the school, particularly in Key Stage 3.

I know that if the school works on these areas with energy and commitment, it will be well placed to improve further.

Clive Kempton Her Majesty's Inspector