

Lakers School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115774
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312063
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	765
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Evans
Headteacher	Alison Elliott
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Five Acres Coleford GL16 7QW
Telephone number	01594 832263
Fax number	01594 832486

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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

Lakers School is a smaller-than-average secondary school situated in the Forest of Dean. It has been a specialist school in business and enterprise since September 2007. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds in the school is very low, as is the number of students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is slightly below the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is higher than that found in most schools. The school has received the full International Schools award, the Healthy School award, the Sportsmark Gold award and the Artsmark Silver award. It holds Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is providing a satisfactory standard of education overall. The senior leadership team has been strengthened recently and under its clear vision and direction, Lakers is improving. Particular features of the school, such as partnerships with outside agencies, provision of care, students' adoption of healthy lifestyles and their contribution to the community, are outstanding. All aspects of the school are at least satisfactory but there are inconsistencies in the quality of leadership and management and teaching and learning which lead to the students' satisfactory achievement.

Test and examination results are rising and the gap between these and the national averages over time, particularly at Key Stage 4, is closing. When students join the school, they are working at levels which are below average. By the time they leave at the end of Year 11, standards are in line with the national average. Students make satisfactory progress overall because the quality of the teaching is satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in line with their peers in lessons but good progress when they receive specialist support or provision.

Students' personal development and well-being are good overall. Students have outstanding attitudes to adopting healthy lifestyles; the physical education team plays a significant part in this. Students' contribution to the community in the way they make decisions and take responsibilities is also outstanding. Despite the hard work of the school with other agencies, levels of attendance remain broadly average.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory because of the wide range in their quality, which extends from outstanding to inadequate. Teaching is not consistent in the way lessons are planned to take account of different groups of learners and the way work is assessed through marking of books. There are examples of outstanding practice, which are not sufficiently shared and embedded throughout the school.

The curriculum is good. Arrangements for local partnerships are outstanding. The development of flexible vocational pathways and the innovative '7UP' programme in Year 7 are strengths of the provision. Parents and students have commended the range of extra-curricular activities but, as yet, curriculum changes have not had sufficient impact on raising standards for lower-attaining students.

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Pastoral care is outstanding. Arrangements for academic guidance are satisfactory, although they are not sufficiently established across the school and are applied inconsistently within teams. While many parents commented favourably about the school, particularly on the quality of care, a significant minority do not feel sufficiently informed and involved.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall but with a number of strengths. The leadership of the headteacher and newly established senior leadership team is good and there is good capacity within this team to make the further improvements needed. The governing body has made rapid improvements and carries out its responsibilities to support and challenge the school well. The specialist status has been achieved very recently and so it is too early to judge its impact yet. The leadership of team leaders is too varied, however, and inconsistencies at this level have held the school back from making improvements at a faster rate. Senior leaders have a clear view of where the strengths and weaknesses lie at this level and are working hard

to make improvements through a series of subject reviews. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the quality of leadership and management of middle leaders is consistently good.
- Ensure that the best examples of lesson planning, provision for different learners and assessment are shared and applied throughout the school.
- Work closely with parents to engage them more in their children's learning.

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

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. When they join the school at the start of Year 7, students are working at levels that are below average. By the time students leave at the end of Year 11, standards are broadly average.

At Key Stage 3, results in the national tests have been steadily improving in English and mathematics, and in 2007, closed the gap with the national averages, although in science the gap widened. Overall, standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly average. Standards in GCSE examinations have risen over time for students attaining five or more A* to C grades. The proportion of five good passes including English and mathematics has also risen. The school recognises that the proportion achieving five or more A* to G grades is not high enough and has taken steps, particularly in its vocational curriculum, to address this. While the school met and exceeded its challenging target for higher-attaining students, it did not do so for lower-attaining boys.

There is variability in performance in individual subjects at GCSE. Students did well in physical education, religious education, information and communication technology, business studies, history and art and design compared with national results but less well in English, mathematics and science. Students from vulnerable groups make satisfactory progress in line with their peers but do better when they receive specialist support. Recent improvements to the analysis of data have enabled the school to identify students at risk of underachieving, but there is too much inconsistency within subjects in how effectively this information is used.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students value the range of opportunities provided for them through tutor periods, assemblies and lessons to reflect on issues important to them. They enjoy the social aspects of school, in particular their friendships, and many demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Students report that they feel safe, and are confident that any incidents of bullying and racial harassment are dealt with effectively. Their awareness and adoption of healthy and safe lifestyles is excellent. They particularly value the creative menus available to them in the canteen and the wealth of sporting opportunities available to them, both during and after school.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory. The number of exclusions is falling, although a significant minority of parents identified behaviour as an area of concern. Attendance levels are satisfactory and are broadly in line with the national average. The school council is very active. Students welcome the outstanding opportunities they have to contribute to decision making, for example, the new school uniform, curriculum changes and observation of teaching. Senior students take responsibility as prefects. Most students in school contribute to the school and wider community through fundraising events for charities and global links, for example, with Kenya. Careers education, work experience and the development of enterprise and business understanding prepare students well for their future lives. However, the strategies to improve the basic skills of all learners in order to prepare them for the world of work have had insufficient impact on standards so far.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there is too much variation in the ways teachers plan and deliver lessons to meet the different needs of students. The most effective planning occurs where teachers use assessment to inform lessons and where a range of stimulating activities is employed to enable all learners to make good progress. Similarly, where teaching assistants are used well, their work is included in lesson planning. For example, the specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures these learners are well supported.

In the most exciting lessons, students were asked to react spontaneously to emotions inspired by music, or where they had made castles and brought them in, to talk about them. However, one teaching group which experienced such stimulating teaching went on to another lesson where they were given undemanding exercises to carry out that had little relevance to their lives or to the topic in hand. In this lesson they had little idea of how well they were doing or how to improve. Behaviour was excellent in the most effective lessons but elsewhere there was too much student chatter and an informality that did not show sufficient respect for teachers. The monitoring of teaching, although well set up, has not yet resulted in a uniform good quality across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum provides opportunities for students to follow both academic and work-related pathways as they progress through the school. A small number of students pursue courses in local colleges or with employers, which can lead to young apprenticeships. Students' choices are informed by visits to local employers, with whom the school enjoys very good relationships. A number of external agencies, such as 'Forest Partnerships', run projects that broaden students' horizons. The number taking modern foreign languages at GCSE is very small and of concern to the school. Most students follow an academic route and they have a good range of subjects from which to choose. The school offers a programme of guidance to help with their option choices, but this does not always result in choices that lead to good achievement.

The programme of enrichment activities is broad and includes a wide range of sporting fixtures and fitness-related clubs as well as business and cultural pursuits. There are choirs, including

a rugby choir, trips abroad and arts events. These are well attended. The school has links with Kenya and has very good relationships with its feeder primary schools, where Year 7 students act as mentors. Students are encouraged to become involved with the development of the Lakers' curriculum; they have reviewed and reported on this aspect. An innovative '7 UP' project for Year 7 lets students take the lead in exploring topics of personal interest to them, such as their own identity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall. Pastoral support is outstanding. Links with outside agencies are excellent and the school runs many projects to help specific groups of students. For example, the Connexions service provides a wide range of support and guidance for students, and particularly those who are disaffected, to help them consider options and vocations. An outstanding system of induction and links with primary schools and the neighbouring further education college ensure that there is a good start for all students. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early on in their school life and support programmes implemented. Child protection is taken very seriously and secure records are kept. Health and safety procedures are systematic and rigorous.

Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. Although teachers have access to a good range of information about students' academic capabilities, systems to monitor progress and provide good academic guidance are not applied consistently across teams. As a result, not all students make rapid progress towards challenging targets. Most students are aware of how well they are progressing in their learning but the quality of teachers' marking and the help it gives to students to improve their work, although satisfactory, is too variable.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is held in high esteem in both the school and the local community. Her energy and commitment have helped to steer the school through a difficult period of change. Recent staffing issues have been addressed in a sensitive but robust manner. She has led the creation of a very caring environment, which successfully promotes students' personal development and well-being. The senior leadership team is broadly accurate in evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and is strongly committed to raising standards and achievement. Significant improvements have been implemented to systems and procedures for assessing the level of students' standards and for tracking the progress they make. Adjustments have been made to the curriculum to extend the learning opportunities for all students. There are clear lines of management between senior team members, team leaders and teaching and non-teaching staff. These are characterised by open discussion, sharing of information and regular monitoring and review of performance.

The impact that these procedures are having is evident in, for example, the improvements to standards in Key Stage 4 and improved achievement overall in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. However, the rate of improvement is slower than might be expected because of inconsistencies in the way that policies and procedures are applied at team-leader level. The effectiveness of procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning is variable and some lack rigour. Where a team is led and managed well, students' rate of progress is good. In teams

where leadership is less effective, learning is not so motivating and lower-attaining students in particular do not always enjoy lessons. The school's resources are generally used effectively and efficiently to ensure that students are well taught. External services and outside agencies are used particularly well, for instance, during transition from primary to secondary school and in career guidance. Governance is good. Governors work hard for the school and as a team they offer critical support to hold the school to account.

The school has only held specialist status in business and enterprise since September 2007 and so it is too early to judge the impact of the provision.

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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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
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?	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
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	2
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

Dear Students

Inspection of Lakers School, Coleford, Gloucestershire GL16 7QW

You will know that we recently came to inspect your school, and we thought you would like to know what we have said in our report.

Thank you very much to those of you who took time to speak to us about your school and to help us find our way around.

Overall, we think the school is providing a satisfactory standard of education. The progress you make in your achievement at school is also satisfactory. We have seen a number of excellent features that the school does really well, such as the partnerships with other local schools and colleges and the way you are looked after in school. You do your bit too through the outstanding way you lead healthy lifestyles and take responsibilities, for example, having a say on the new curriculum and the school uniform. We think that overall, your personal development and well-being is good.

We have suggested three things to your leaders which we feel will help the school to make further improvements. First, to make sure that all the subjects you study are organised as well as the very best. Second, to take steps to ensure that all your lessons are as good as those that are well matched to your needs and are made enjoyable by exciting activities. Finally, we have asked the school to work closely with all your parents and carers to involve them as much as possible in your learning.

I hope you will play your part in helping the school to improve further. May I take the opportunity to wish you every success in your future careers.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims (Her Majesty's Inspector)

29 February 2008



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