

Cove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116446
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312315
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale 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	1024
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Carol Lloyd
Headteacher	Ms Megan Davies-Jones
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2004
School address	St John's Road Cove Farnborough GU14 9RN
Telephone number	01252 542397
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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

Cove School is an average sized mixed comprehensive school. It is a designated Technology College and holds the Enhanced Healthy schools and ECO awards. Attainment on entry is broadly average. The majority of students are of white British ethnic origin, with some from a wide range of other ethnic groups including an increasing number of Nepalese. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with statements, is below the national average. There is an attached Hearing Impaired unit for seven students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory and improving school is strongly supported in its progress by students and the parent body. As one parent commented, 'I'm very impressed with the headteacher, the staff and general ethos of the school.' This is typical of the opinions held by a large majority of parents. However, whilst GCSE results in 2007 were in line with national averages, they masked underachievement by a number of students. This meant that, taken as a whole, the above average ability Year 11 made less progress in the school than would have been expected of them. Achievement and standards in Key Stage 3 were satisfactory. The school has worked hard to address the long-term staff absence it has suffered, including in core subjects, that was a contributing factor to weaknesses in its performance last year. Current rates of progress are satisfactory and improving in both key stages and staffing is more stable. Students with statements of special educational need, particularly those in the Hearing Impaired unit, are currently making faster progress. This is due to the individual support they receive. Teaching and learning are improving and standards rising.

The inclusive ethos of the school warmly welcomes students, and good work through the specialist status has aided transition from the primary schools into Year 7. Students say they feel safe, well cared for and are confident that any bullying and behaviour issues are addressed promptly. They exhibit an enjoyment of being in school of which Cove can be proud. Parents are particularly impressed with the care and support their children are offered. A real strength of the school is the diligent way safety matters are addressed in school and during off site learning. Student council members are proud of the way the school has responded to their suggestions and students make a good contribution in the school community and beyond. The school is working hard to publicise the link between attendance and achievement with some parents but attendance remains just below the national average. Students understand how to stay healthy and regularly participate in sporting and dramatic activities and usually follow healthy eating advice.

The satisfactory curriculum offers the majority of students appropriate courses of study in both key stages. However, the statutory requirements for religious education are not met in Key Stage 4 and vocational choices are somewhat limited, although plans are in place to enhance them. Specialist technology status is beginning to have significant impact at Cove with the use of information communications technology (ICT) permeating all areas of the curriculum. Extra-curricular activities are a strength, with sporting, music and drama activities enthusiastically attended. Teaching has recently become good overall with excellent relationships creating a positive learning atmosphere where teachers know and understand the needs of their students. However, occasionally, teachers do not make enough use of their knowledge of the levels students are working at to plan the next steps in learning for the full range of abilities. A few lessons are over-directed by teachers and hence do not enable students to work at different speeds. Assessment information is being used more effectively to set challenging subject targets for students to work towards, although there is some inconsistency between subjects in their approach to how challenging targets should be. Students are consistently aware of what is expected of them and are keen to aspire to the targets set for them. Excellent staff student relationships mean that verbal guidance and support are easily accessible. However, written guidance through marking is inconsistent.

The good leadership and management are securing a steady improvement in the school's performance. The key to this is the dedicated leadership of the headteacher. Past difficulties

in recruiting staff are easing. Where they still exist, effective management reduces their negative impact on learning. The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and collects extensive evidence. Careful improvement planning addresses key issues, although criteria for success are not sharp enough. Data use is improving and this is beginning to have a positive impact on targeting and intervention to address underachievement. However, use of performance data to drive improvement is not uniformly judicious across departmental areas. This means the targeting of individual need is effectively raising standards but that progress is not maximised for all students in all subjects. The creation of such a positive climate for learning, improvements in teaching and learning and caring committed staff, including governors, demonstrates good capacity for continued improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the use of assessment data to maximize students' progress.
- Improve teaching by focusing consistently on individual student learning.
- Develop the curriculum to meet statutory requirements in religious education at Key Stage 4, and widen the choice of vocational options available.

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 finishing their GCSEs in the summer of 2007 made less progress than would be expected from their above average starting points. This resulted in standards in their examinations that were in line with the national average. Progress in English, particularly, was good and resulted in students achieving 74% A*-C. However, staff instability in some subjects held back students' progress. The school is currently managing to address this effectively. Coupled to staffing issues were a number of Year 11 students who attended poorly last year and, in some cases, failed to complete examinations, despite the school's best efforts to encourage them. Targets for current Year 11 students are more demanding and recent evidence indicates faster progress from lower starting points toward these. All subject areas are demonstrating improved teaching and learning and better use of data to intervene with underachieving students. This has led to progress that is currently satisfactory but accelerating, with standards rising. Progress during Key Stage 3 is also satisfactory and levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science are close to the national average.

Students from minority ethnic groups and those for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers. More effective tracking of performance particularly benefits those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Progress by these students and those attached to the Hearing Impaired unit exceed that of other students due to the individual support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The quality of spiritual development has improved since the last inspection. Cultural development is particularly strong and students' understanding of art, music and drama are well developed. A large number of

students are involved in the many theatrical and musical events the school stages. Students generally understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and there is a strong involvement in sports and physical activities. The school canteen, which has a firm commitment to healthy eating, is well supported. Students fully understand the importance of safety around the school and in lessons. They follow safety guidance extremely well and conduct themselves in a safe manner. Behaviour of most learners is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. However, some isolated cases of less impressive behaviour were seen in one or two lessons. Students very much enjoy their education at Cove School. They participate well in lessons and collaborate very effectively in paired and group work where required. Attendance is generally satisfactory. It is a little below the national average, although the school works hard to encourage attendance. There is strong community spirit within the school and students with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds work well together in lessons. Students make a positive contribution to the community of the school. They take on a variety of roles of responsibility. Besides involvement in the school council and acting as school prefects, students work to support others. For example, older students support younger ones on entry to the school as part of the school's buddy system and some Year 10 students act as learning mentors for Year 7 students, helping them to organise their work and prepare for lessons. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory. Students have good capability in using ICT and their literacy skills are high, as is shown by the large proportion of students who achieve well in GCSE English. However, the limitations in vocational courses and shortcomings in students' numeracy skills detract from this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that the quality of teaching and learning has recently become good overall. However, it is yet to fully impact on student progress due to the legacy of staffing instability. Relationships between staff and students are very positive and students display a good attitude to learning, clearly enjoying their education. Most lessons start well with clear objectives for learning and interesting activities that enable students to engage readily in the tasks set. Students appreciate the improvements in their learning environment over the last few years. Most classrooms are now well equipped, ICT is used regularly and attractive displays aid learning. Students value the regular class discussions in most subjects. In the best lessons, well exemplified by some subject leaders during the inspection, probing questions effectively promote students' understanding of new concepts and are used to check learning. Similarly, clear explanations and illustration by teachers, using a range of resources, help students to remain fully on task. In these lessons, planned activities are targeted at the different needs of individuals and students make good progress. Where lessons are only satisfactory, activities are planned for the class as a whole with insufficient regard for the differing needs of students, and questions are sometimes insufficiently directed to individuals in order to promote their progress. The school is working hard to drive up the quality of teaching and the proportion of good teaching is increasing. However, marking is inconsistent both within subjects and across the curriculum. The best marking clearly explains what students should do to improve but the school is aware that this is not a sufficiently regular feature to promote faster student progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school offers a satisfactory and improving curriculum. Most issues from the last inspection have been addressed well. For example, students resoundingly agree that opportunities to use information technology now in most subjects have, '...improved massively...', reflecting the direct impact specialist status is having on the school. The developing virtual learning environment is, according to students, starting to give them a far greater sense of '...control of their learning...' and they see the potential it has to '...give easier access to their own grades'. Similarly, new equipment and energetic, passionate leadership in music and physical education have resulted in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are really contributing to the strong community ethos of the school. Students have a good choice of academic subjects in Key Stage 4 and the school has promoted the uptake of modern foreign languages by introducing Spanish in Key Stage 3. The school still does not meet the statutory requirements for religious education for all in Key Stage 4 however. Steps are being taken to provide for the full ability range of the rapidly growing group of Nepalese students. The development of vocational options for all students, both within school and through collaborative provision, is too slow. This means that some groups of students, particularly less able White British boys, did not gain as many qualifications as might have been expected last year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Cove School provides a safe and supportive environment that establishes a good foundation for learning and achievement. Students feel that the school is a safe place and that they are well looked after. The good quality of care is evidenced by the teachers' commitment to students' health and safety and by their promotion of students' enjoyment of education. Students are well informed about their progress in most subjects and lessons. However, targets are not consistently challenging and this means rates of progress vary across subject areas.

Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and effective. Health and safety matters are well organised and regularly reviewed and effective procedures are in place for assessing safety concerns regarding events and school visits. Learners at risk are identified efficiently and appropriate measures are put in place to support them. The school has an effective monitoring system for these students and good links with outside agencies help it carry out its work effectively. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make relatively faster progress than their peers because the school has put in place effective support programmes that link well to subject lessons, particularly English. In many cases, students are supported in advance for specific lessons rather than in the lesson itself. By this means, the students' self-confidence and independence are developed.

Hearing impaired students are very well supported. Students individually attend a teaching unit with acoustically prepared work spaces and technical equipment for intensive work with a specialist teacher. This work is linked directly to their subject studies or targeted at specific language development. This strong liaison between subject departments and the specialist facility has ensured good progress for those students. The school continues to introduce improved acoustic equipment in teaching areas across the school for the benefit of all students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear understanding of what the school must do to continue to improve. Under her guidance, the school has made effective progress since the last inspection. The senior leadership team are increasing their capacity to support the headteacher in improving standards and have helped to establish a school community with a positive ethos providing a foundation for further development. Targets are set for students and departments to raise standards. Due to the way these are implemented, the degree of challenge is inconsistent across subject areas. However, they are used effectively to monitor progress and intervention procedures are helping to raise standards. School self-evaluation is regular, targeted and helps to focus managers on key areas for improvement. The full benefits of the process are yet to be realised in all departments. Specialist status has resulted in additional ICT resources for the school and is beginning to make a difference to examination results in mathematics and science. The headteacher and senior team have used the resources at their disposal well to address a budget deficit, whilst effectively improving the environment for learning. There is no discernable difference in achievement between groups of learners although the school has had to consider approaches to improve the performance of boys based on analysis of past performance and this has resulted in earlier and more effective intervention. The governing body have become much more aware of school processes and targets, strengths and weaknesses. This has allowed them to challenge more effectively whilst providing appropriate support. The strategies and procedures put in place by the headteacher are improving the quality of leadership and management at all levels and the school is now in a position to harness the many strengths of its staff to raise standards to a new level.

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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	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	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
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

17 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Cove School, Farnborough, GU14 9RN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed speaking to you and finding out your views about your education. We think your school gives you a satisfactory and improving standard of education. We were impressed by the excellent working relationships that many of you have with your teachers. It is clear that the school helps you develop as individuals during your studies and one of you told us that you 'never wanted to leave'.

Teaching is improving and has recently become good overall but is still not always targeted at individual needs. The school staff is more stable, particularly in English, mathematics and science, which has helped this improvement. We were impressed with your good behaviour in and around school. However, some of you do not come to school regularly enough and last year some students missed exams. The curriculum is improving and you are able to choose from a wide range of subjects in Key Stage 4. However, religious education is not currently available to you and the range of vocational options is limited. You are given good opportunities to take part in activities out of lessons and particularly enjoy sports, drama and music. Your school is a caring and supportive place and you say you feel safe and valued.

The most important thing to concentrate on now is helping you to learn even more quickly. We have asked staff to make sure that:

- teaching meets your individual learning needs in all lessons
- your subject teachers consistently use the assessment data they hold on you to maximise your progress
- in Key Stage 4, you receive the statutory religious education curriculum you are entitled to and that the school widens the range of vocational subjects for you to choose from.

Everyone wants Cove to keep on improving and your parents are particularly impressed with the work of your headteacher in improvements made so far. We think if you keep working and learning together, your school will go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector