

Guilsborough School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 122061 |
| Local Authority | Northamptonshire |
| Inspection number | 314207 |
| Inspection dates | 6–7 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Matharu HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1079 |
| 6th form | 246 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Angela Carter |
| Headteacher | Christine Staley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 September 2004 |
| School address | West Haddon Road Guilsborough Northampton NN6 8QE |
| Telephone number | 01604 740641 |
| Fax number | 01604 740136 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Guilsborough School is a larger than average comprehensive school with a sixth form, serving the predominantly rural area of Guilsborough and surrounding villages. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The vast majority of students are of White British origin. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school was awarded Specialist Technology Status in September 1998. It also holds the Investors in People, Artsmark Silver, Sportsmark, Citizenship Gold and Healthy Schools Silver Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school with some outstanding features. Standards are consistently above average and improving, and achievement is good. This is due to the school's rigorously implemented improvement strategies, which are based on an accurate understanding of current strengths and weaknesses. There are excellent links with other providers and the community.

The personal development of students is one of the strengths of the school. Students are particularly well informed about how to develop healthier lifestyles, through participation in sport and seeking healthier options in the school canteen. Their school council has been largely instrumental in achieving the Healthy Schools Silver Award. The vigorous school council and school forums make an excellent contribution to school life. Students say that they feel they are partners with the staff in making decisions that will affect the life of the school community. They enjoy a vast range of challenging opportunities, such as the World Challenge and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. These enrich the school experience for a significant number of students.

Teaching and learning are good, which prompts very good enjoyment of learning for most students. However, the quality of marking and feedback to students is not consistent across the different subjects and the school's 'best practice' in terms of teaching and learning is not routinely shared to help teaching improve. The curriculum is constantly reviewed and developed to meet students' needs. Consequently, vocational provision has improved and continues to grow. The care, guidance and support for students are exemplary. The excellent focus on supportive pastoral care has been complemented by very effective monitoring and support of academic progress, particularly for those students who are considered to be underachieving. This was a major factor in the improvement in students' academic results in 2007. Though marking could be improved, the target setting process is very effective in focusing students' attention on what they are aiming for.

The headteacher leads the school with vigour and determination. Leadership and management are strong and effective at all levels across the school. There is an impressive shared sense of purpose that centres on supporting students to achieve as highly as possible. Parental views of the school are mostly positive; a large number of parents commented favourably on many aspects of the school's work. The comment from one parent, "All of my children have attended the school and I feel it has given them a very good start in life," typifies the majority of parents' views. Specialist Technology Status continues to contribute strongly to whole-school improvement. This is evident in developments in the curriculum and improvements in teaching and learning, where the specialist areas of design technology, mathematics and science contribute much to the school's continuing improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The inclusive sixth form is good and improving. Students attain above average standards and make good progress. Students' personal development is good. They are good ambassadors of the school and contribute very positively by mentoring younger students. The Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (COPE) programme is a good addition to the curriculum and supports students' personal development. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Students work well independently and relationships between students and staff are strong. The curriculum

is good. Students can study academic and/or vocational subjects. There is an expanding vocational curriculum and links are developing with local employers. The sixth form's innovative website is well used by students to enhance their learning. The care, guidance and support provided are good. There are clear tracking and monitoring systems that enable students who are underperforming to have a targeted intervention programme put into place. Students speak highly of the support and guidance provided. A large number continue into higher education. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, and a number of improvement strategies are being applied. However, these have not yet had sufficient time to have a full impact.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning to the highest levels evident in the school by consistently sharing and disseminating best practice across subjects.
- Ensure that marking and feedback to students consistently informs them how to improve their work across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

From above average attainment on entry, students achieve standards at the end of Year 9 that are well above the national average. In 2007, Key Stage 3 test results were well above average in all subjects. In particular, results in mathematics and science at all levels were better than found nationally. Students make good progress in all subjects at Key Stage 3 and sometimes excellent progress as in mathematics and science in 2007.

The percentage of students gaining an A* to C grade GCSE in English and mathematics has been well above the national average for the past three years. The results of 2007 were the school's best yet overall and a significant improvement from 2006, when GCSE results were lower than anticipated. The school carefully analysed the performances of 2006 and took action to improve the situation. For example, careful consideration of performance data has identified where students would benefit from individual mentoring. This has been rigorously implemented to good effect. Particularly high standards were achieved in a number of subjects in 2007, for example, in mathematics, science, design technology, geography and music, where results were well above national averages. Pupils who took GCSEs in 2007 made good progress in their time in the school. The monitoring data held by the school confirms that the progress of current students is good. Good progress was observed in lessons across all subjects at both Key Stages during the inspection. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress to others in their year groups.

In the 2007 Advanced Level results, students achieved well, particularly in media studies, psychology and sociology. However, they performed less well in information and communication technology (ICT) and religious studies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding and a major strength of the school. Students enjoy coming to school and want to learn. They are considerate in their

behaviour towards each other, with little bullying reported, as the result of successful initiatives in which they themselves have been closely involved, such as, the 'bully-buster' peer mentors in the lower school. The majority of students work hard and generally behave well both in and out of lessons. Attendance levels are above average, but the school is not complacent, constantly working to improve further with very effective strategies.

The school promotes the students' social development very successfully through a wide variety of enriching extra-curricular activities. There are numerous fundraising events, which are organised and run by students themselves. These opportunities encourage students to exercise their spirit of generosity and care for others, as well as to mature into responsible citizens. Students' citizenship coursework, detailing each individual's activities, makes impressive and heartening reading. Students' spiritual and moral development is excellent. Their needs are met through an imaginative curriculum underpinned by a supportive school ethos. For example, uplifting assemblies are based on the school's 'Ten Pillars of Wisdom', which cover qualities such as tolerance, integrity, dependability, respect and compassion for others. Consequently, students have a strong sense of right and wrong, and feel an obligation to help and care for others. In recognition of the school's isolated rural location, successful efforts are made to broaden students' cultural awareness through developing links with an inner-city multicultural school, and an impressive number of international links. These are based on collaboration in curriculum projects with schools in Tanzania, Honduras and Malawi, amongst others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are of a good quality. Teachers' enthusiasm, thorough subject knowledge and their use of a good range of teaching styles successfully engages students. Their excellent relationships with students create a calm atmosphere in which students are confident in expressing their views. Teachers have good classroom management skills and make good use of ICT and other resources to promote learning and share expertise. Most lessons are well planned, with some examples of exemplary planning, for example, in a Year 7 physical education lesson that very effectively met individual needs.

When learning is most successful, this is because of teachers' highly effective questioning and modelling skills, good pace, and the careful sequencing of progressive and logical activities that are well matched to students' needs. In these lessons, students are encouraged to become reflective learners and respect the opinions of their peers in evaluating and extending their understanding. In one outstanding Year 13 drama lesson, the teacher's skilful questioning and use of specific drama and dance techniques enabled exceptional progress to be made. However, there are occasions throughout the school when activities are not well enough matched to learners' needs and consequently students' progress slows. Feedback to students is often good but not consistently so. Whilst some marking is thorough and diagnostic, some is superficial and does not provide specific guidance to students on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

catered for well through a range of both academic and vocational courses, enabling them to develop and sustain their interests. The school's Specialist Status has a positive influence on the curriculum enabling early examination entry for technology subjects in Year 10. This sustains students' interest and commitment within this area and allows greater flexibility in the curriculum in Year 11. Although the provision for ICT has improved, not all students currently study the subject in its own right in Years 10 and 11. ICT is integrated across the curriculum at present, although there are plans to introduce an ICT course to all Key Stage 4 students next year. The school has an imaginative approach to curriculum design and is currently exploring new curriculum opportunities at both key stages. There are good enrichment opportunities, noticeably in sports and music, where provision is strong and students' participation is enthusiastic and often to a high standard. Students are prepared very well for adult life, with extra tuition in numeracy and literacy where needed and a range of work-related experiences, such as enterprise days, work experience and a 'Preparation for Working Life' course.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for students are outstanding. Pastoral support is first rate, with a wide range of strategies utilised by experienced, well qualified staff to provide excellent support. There is close liaison with outside agencies when necessary. Support for students' well-being is exemplary with a range of suitable provision, including valuable links with the local general practitioner's (GP) surgery. The arrangements for health and safety are good with, for example, the school currently reviewing arrangements for whole-school training to maintain staff awareness. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are secure. Students confirm they feel safe in school and are willing to approach any adult if they need help. The good transition arrangements from primary school enable students to settle quickly when they first arrive. Sixth formers support students in the main school, both with peer mentoring and by enhancing opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Students' academic progress is monitored very closely with their achievement being assessed several times during the year by both subject teachers and tutors. Where students are underachieving, a range of suitable interventions are employed that are having a positive impact on standards and achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported, enabling them to make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher's strong leadership provides the school community with a clear direction and this has lifted expectations and is helping to raise standards. She maintains a clear focus on improving outcomes for students. The headteacher

is well supported by a strong leadership team with a shared understanding of the priority to raise achievement. The commitment to equality and inclusion is strong, as shown by the efforts to engage and motivate all students, including those who are challenging, and the good provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors evaluate the school's performance thoroughly and accurately, if a little modestly. The identification of strengths and areas to improve is based upon careful analysis of students' performance data and provides a secure foundation for improvement planning. This planning at both whole school and department level is detailed and clear. Accurate monitoring of teaching promotes good self and department evaluation. As a result, teachers lead teaching and learning training sessions to share innovations and this contributes strongly to the school's drive to improve teaching and learning. However, long-established good practice is not shared to the same extent.

Leadership across the school is good. There is widespread engagement in monitoring the school's work. Subject and year leaders are key players in school improvement. They are encouraged to make decisions and plan the focus of their professional discussions with colleagues. This is helping staff to be effective as leaders and to support students' achievement and personal development. Consequently, they feel well supported and valued for the contributions to whole-school improvement that they make. The staff professional development programme, particularly for middle and emerging leaders, provides high quality training and is a strength of the school.

Morale of the wider staff is very good; the collaborative atmosphere works well to the advantage of students. The work of governors is supportive, but appropriately challenging. Accountability and support are well balanced. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

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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 | 16-19 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 | |
| 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 | 2 | |

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? | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 1 | |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 | |
| 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 | 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

February 11 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Guilsborough School, Guilsborough NN6 8QE

Thank you for your warm welcome when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views about your school. We found that Guilsborough School is providing you with a good standard of education overall with some outstanding features.

You achieve above average standards at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. You make good progress with your learning throughout the school. We were particularly impressed with the maturity, confidence and sense of responsibility that most of you display. You are supported extremely well in your moral and social development by many excellent opportunities, which help you to develop outstanding personal skills and qualities. Your links with other schools, in this country and abroad, are helping you to understand the society within which we all live, and to show respect, tolerance and care for others. The teaching you receive is good and you clearly enjoy very positive relationships with the adults in your school. We found that your school is well led and managed and there is a constant drive by the headteacher and her staff to try new ideas, find new curriculum opportunities, improve learning where possible and help you to achieve as highly as possible.

We have asked your school to consider just two things. First, to share widely the very best teaching and learning that we saw, so that all teachers and students can benefit from the expertise that exists in your school. Second, to ensure that all of your work is marked consistently well by providing helpful comments so that you know how to improve further. You can support this by noting the feedback and acting on your teachers' advice.

We feel sure that your school will continue to improve and look forward to hearing of your future successes.

Best wishes
Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu Her Majesty's Inspector



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Yours sincerely

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Her Majesty's Inspector