

The Elizabethan High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122885
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LA
Inspection number	314432
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	David Martin HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1222
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Parry
Headteacher	Ms L French
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Hallcroft Road Retford Nottinghamshire DN22 7PY
Telephone number	01777 713700
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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 and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school gained specialist science college status in September 2005 and since September 2007 has enjoyed attractive purpose-built accommodation. It is above average size with a gradually increasing intake. The school serves a mixed area with some areas of considerable socio-economic disadvantage, drawing students from the local market town of Retford and several local villages. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The great majority of students are from white British backgrounds with a very small proportion not speaking English as a first language. Overseas students from other minority ethnic backgrounds join the Post-16 Centre as part of the European Funding programme. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased to around average in recent cohorts. The proportion with a statement of particular need is below average. The prior attainment of students joining the school is broadly average but declining in recent years.

Since September 2007, older students have studied at the separate Post-16 Centre as part of a partnership between The Elizabethan High School, the other comprehensive school and special school in the town and a local college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Elizabethan High School is a satisfactory and improving school. It has undergone a significant period of change, not least the move to a delightful new building in September 2007. The unsatisfactory nature of the old split site buildings and the distraction of the move to new premises resulted in the initially slow rate of improvement since the last inspection. In the last two years, however, progress has been much more rapid. This is due to several factors: enhanced leadership and management capacity at a senior level has driven improvement; specialist status has had a significant impact on teaching and learning and is beginning to improve standards; middle leadership has been restructured, and successful new appointments have been made. The improved building and facilities have increased motivation and morale for everyone working at the school.

The headteacher has built a united, capable and ambitious senior leadership team. Planning is very thorough and informed by the comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. This has led to improvements in the many areas rightly identified as requiring attention. Systems are much more robust. Examples of this include the effective support offered to those who find learning more difficult, and in the much-improved use of assessment information and data at a whole school level. This effective monitoring of practice is becoming more evident at middle leader level, although the school is aware that inconsistencies remain. The 'improving learning group' is having a growing impact on the quality of learning and is focusing increasingly on thinking skills and learning styles. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with many good lessons observed during the inspection. Consequently, standards are average, and achievement is satisfactory and improving. However, the school's extensive range of information on students' attainment is not used well enough to match work to students' capabilities in all lessons.

Amongst improvements in provision, changes to the satisfactory curriculum are having the greatest impact. In 2007, too many students left the school without achieving any examination success. The introduction of vocational subjects is already making a difference, although the full impact of this will not be seen until the present Year 10 complete their studies in 2009. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has greatly improved, largely due to specialist status. Students are pleased with the way that this is starting to improve lesson presentation. They find greater access to ICT motivating and enjoyable. The support for the growing number of students with learning needs is increasingly effective. Students are well cared for and feel that staff are supportive and helpful. Behaviour is good in many lessons and satisfactory around the school, although a number of parents expressed concerns. The school has worked hard to improve attendance to satisfactory levels. There has been some slight decline recently and lateness to school, partly caused by transport difficulties, is not fully resolved.

Leaders, managers and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses. Through rigorous monitoring, self-evaluation is largely accurate and broadly matches the findings of the inspection team. Recent acceleration in progress means that there is a satisfactory capacity to improve the school further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form recently successfully relocated to impressive new accommodation, where provision is shared with partner institutions. The partnership is at an early stage of development, but students express positive views about the change. Students enjoy learning and most are ambitious to achieve well. Most complete the courses they begin. However, the attendance of a significant minority is erratic. Many students contribute very well in supporting younger students in the main school. Students make satisfactory progress and AS and A level standards are broadly average. Results of A level courses were better than those at AS level in 2007. Current data indicate improved performance at both levels. The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and the curriculum gives students a suitable range of courses and enrichment opportunities. Opportunities to follow Level 1 and 2 vocational courses are mainly provided by a partner college in other premises. This curriculum and systems to enable students to achieve higher standards are in place but have not yet had the intended impact on performance. Students much appreciate the individual academic guidance and support they receive from teachers, although staff travelling between sites limits contact for some students. The current subject timetable prevents some students from attending tutor periods and therefore having access to the full range of guidance and support available. Leaders and managers have established positive working relationships in the centre. Good practice is developing among subject managers of partner schools to ensure a consistently good quality of teaching in individual subjects, but this is not yet consistent across the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement throughout the school by using the available assessment data to match work more carefully to students' needs.
- Make leadership and management practice more consistently effective at middle leader level, including in the sixth form.
- Improve attendance throughout the school by making tracking and intervention systems more rigorous and effective.
- Ensure that all students in the sixth form have equal access to all systems of support and guidance.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

At Key Stage 3, attainment in tests overall has declined slightly over the last three years but English results improved to significantly above average in 2007. Current tracking shows a significant improvement in performance, with the school on track to improve scores at all levels in English, mathematics and science. The progress made by students at Key Stage 3 has improved steadily in the last three years but was still below expected levels in 2007. Current assessment data indicates that students are on line to achieve expected levels of progress in 2008 tests.

Standards at Key Stage 4 have improved over the last few years and are now broadly average. There was a particularly strong improvement in 5 A*-C grades in 2007, particularly those including English and mathematics. Most groups of students made similar progress, although the school recognises that too many students left school without attaining any examination passes. The progress made by students by the time they leave the school has been relatively weak in recent years. Current tracking data and modules already assessed indicate that students are now making better progress due to regular tracking and successful intervention strategies. Very few students will leave without some form of accreditation and a higher proportion of more able students are on course to achieve higher grades.

The school failed to meet most of its ambitious performance targets in 2007. It is on track to be much closer to the targets, including specialist targets, in 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, and social development is satisfactory and well supported by initiatives organised by the students themselves through the school council. Discussions help students to develop an understanding of moral issues. Students feel secure and adopt safe practices in lessons, often assessing risk for themselves when using equipment. They appreciate that the new school building helps to minimise opportunities for bullying and anti-social behaviour. Because of the good relationships with adults, students are confident that poor behaviour is swiftly and effectively dealt with. Behaviour seen in classes and around the school during the inspection was satisfactory and often good, but a significant number of the parents who responded to the survey believe that it should be better.

Most students enjoy school, act responsibly and work hard in lessons. The large majority attend regularly and punctually. Attendance is in line with national figures. Students contribute to the school community through charity events and maintaining links with organisations overseas. Many students adopt healthy eating practices by making use of improved lunchtime menus. Extra-curricular activities are well supported. These include sports, which help students to maintain their fitness. An increasing number cycle or walk to school. Students gain a satisfactory understanding of how to prepare for future employment through the acquisition of sound skills in ICT and a satisfactory grounding in skills of literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning in the main school and the sixth form are satisfactory, and have features of good, and at times outstanding, practice. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and relationships with students are relaxed and positive. A particular feature of good lessons is the effective questioning technique. Students are encouraged to develop their thinking skills and justify their answers. In these lessons, students develop independent and enquiring attitudes to learning. In some cases, however, teachers provide information without checking students' understanding or reinforcing their learning.

Although assessment data is increasingly used to match lesson content to students' learning styles and abilities, the practice is inconsistent. The more able students are not always challenged enough. When activities are not sufficiently varied to permit all students to contribute, some lose concentration and their learning suffers. Many teachers use ICT very effectively to reinforce teaching and learning but in some subjects access is more limited. Students who find learning difficult are well supported.

The quality of marking is variable. Students' work is marked regularly, and targets for further progress are set, but the advice given is not always clear. Although students know what needs to be improved, they do not always know how to do it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

As a result of regular review and consultation, the curriculum is becoming increasingly effective in meeting students' needs and aspirations. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 is enhanced by drama and Spanish, and all students follow courses in thinking skills. The curriculum is modified effectively for students with particular learning difficulties in order to raise their literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 includes both academic and vocational courses, although these changes are yet to make a full impact on improved attainment. Good links with outside agencies provide courses leading to recognised qualifications for students following a modified curriculum. Students who are gifted or talented are able to take three separate science subjects, statistics and further mathematics. Many are entered early for all or part of the GCSE examinations in other subjects. A wide-ranging personal, social and health education programme includes citizenship, and is enhanced by increasing opportunities for students' involvement in the wider community. Along with well-organised programmes of careers education and relevant work experience, the curriculum ensures that students are properly prepared for their future working lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school works hard to care for students. They receive appropriate advice and guidance in making their decisions, for example about courses and careers. The tutor group system works well to encourage students to maintain appropriate standards of behaviour. Some subjects provide students with accurate information about their progress and this helps them to set realistic targets in their work. However, this is not applied consistently.

Recent initiatives are starting to reduce lateness but the school still has work to do to improve the attendance of a small minority of persistent absentees. The number of exclusions has reduced because of the effective use of the school's Inclusion Base, which works hard to support students who are experiencing difficulties in school.

Students are encouraged to consider risk and safety in practical lessons and the curriculum provides appropriate opportunities, such as in food technology and physical education, to support students' learning about healthy lifestyles. Procedures for safeguarding and child protection meet all of the legal requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher has led the school effectively through a period of change, including the relocation to a new building. In the last two years, she has created new management structures and robust systems. There is now an impressive capability at senior leadership level and a strong, corporate sense of direction and planning. Many middle leaders and managers are new in post, while many are making a strong contribution to moving the school forward, particularly in teaching and learning and the monitoring of practice. However, this is inconsistent and progress is therefore not even across all the work of the school.

The school now has comprehensive systems in place to monitor and evaluate provision, but these have yet to make a significant impact on outcomes for all students. The school is now well resourced and there have been significant improvements in ICT equipment and teaching.

Targets are challenging but, in recent years, they have not been met. However, recent assessment information indicates that the school is on track to be closer to these targets, including specialist targets, in 2008. Governors are well informed and supportive. However, they do not currently collect sufficient first hand evidence about key areas of the school's performance to be in a position to hold managers fully to account.

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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
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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	3
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?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	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	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	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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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	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	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	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

18 April 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Elizabethan High School, Retford, DN22 7PY

Thank you for your contribution when we inspected your school recently. Everyone was very friendly and helpful. Your views and opinions helped us very much in our work. I am writing to tell you what we found.

Your school has improved a great deal in the last couple of years as you have settled into your wonderful new main school building and sixth form centre. You told us how pleased you are with the new accommodation, particularly the improved ICT facilities. At the same time, leaders and managers who run the school have made significant improvements through careful planning. Teaching and learning have improved considerably. Although satisfactory overall, you told us that you enjoy many good lessons, and we agree. The new vocational courses in the main school and the partnership arrangements in the sixth form have led to a choice of courses that is much better suited to your needs and interests. As a result, examination and test results are improving. Most of you are now making at least satisfactory progress as you move through the school. The GCSE results are particularly pleasing and many of you are now achieving higher grades in English and mathematics. Results in the sixth form are satisfactory, but recent assessment shows that these are also improving. You feel well looked after in school and receive helpful guidance and support to prepare you for your future lives.

The staff at the school are not content for achievement to remain at a satisfactory level. They have many plans to improve the quality of your education. Being a specialist science school is already making a real difference to the curriculum and wider opportunities. We have asked them to improve in these four areas:

- improve achievement throughout the school by using assessment data to match work more carefully to your needs and abilities
- improve attendance throughout the school by making tracking and intervention systems even more rigorous and effective
- ensure that all students in the sixth form have equal access to systems of support and guidance
- make leadership and management practice more consistently effective at middle leader level, including in the sixth form.

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to wish you and the school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector