

The Nottingham Bluecoat School and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122894
Local Authority	City of Nottingham
Inspection number	314433
Inspection dates	20–21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Dilip Kadodwala HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1723
6th form	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs R Ogier
Headteacher	Mrs Sian Hampton
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Aspley Lane Aspley Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG8 5GY
Telephone number	0115 929 7445
Fax number	0115 942 6257

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

This is a larger than average school. Just under a half of the student population is from White British backgrounds. The rest are from a range of British minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 18% are of Pakistani heritage. About 22% of the students are at an early stage of speaking English. The school serves some areas of social and economic disadvantage and a greater than average proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, although the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school has had Specialist Status in technology since September 1996, redesignated in September 2007. Currently, the school has an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Nottingham Bluecoat is a very popular school and its overall effectiveness is good. Students and the large majority of its parents are justified in their praise of it. A parent's response to the inspection questionnaire reflects the view of very many: 'We have nothing but praise for Bluecoat school, and all the hardworking staff, who always go that extra mile to ensure that the children are happy, cared for, and challenged'. Other aspects which parents value highly include the approachability of teachers; the good progress made by their children; the wide range of extracurricular opportunities; a commitment from senior leaders to listen to, and resolve, parents' concerns; and the valuing of young people as human beings within the school's strong Christian ethos.

Achievement and standards are good. A robust tracking system enables senior staff and heads of faculties to monitor and improve students' progress. The inclusive nature of the school is a particular strength which enables all groups of students, including those from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to make good progress. The school's specialist targets are met and, by the time students finish in Year 11, standards are above average. By the time students finish in Year 13, standards are average and they make good progress overall in the sixth form.

Teaching and learning are good, including in the sixth form. This is because, in the main, teachers plan lessons to cater for students' different abilities and there is a careful use of support, for example, for those students who speak English as an additional language. There is also a strong focus on continually improving the quality of teaching through rigorous monitoring, but the wider dissemination of effective practice as a way of increasing the proportion of good teaching is underdeveloped. Assessment is good. When teachers provide feedback to students on their work, including written comments, students are clear about how to improve because students themselves understand the part they have to play in improving their work. However, the quality of feedback and students' involvement is inconsistent.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. The school's strong Christian ethos is reflected in students' high moral stance and concern for others. Students are proud of their school and enjoy attending. The great majority behave well and racial harmony is evident. Students respect, and learn from, the cultural diversity found in the school and in the wider community. Students' contribution to their school and the community is positive. They are encouraged to live healthily and most do so. The curriculum is good with outstanding features. Students benefit from the school's flexible approach towards matching the curriculum to their aspirations. The school's specialism is used well to widen the curriculum and the extensive links with local partners and organisations, including employers, mean that students are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world of work. The level of care and support the school provides for all its students is good, with elements that are outstanding. There is a very strong sense that all individual students matter and that they are of equal value. In practice, this results in the removal of barriers to achievement and a careful use of support, such as mentoring. Students feel safe and secure because safeguarding arrangements are followed meticulously.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory with good elements. The acting principal provides very clear direction for the school. Her drive for improvement is shared by staff and their morale is high. Her senior leadership team and faculty leaders provide her with

sterling support and are effective. Senior leaders have successfully established robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work. This results in managers at senior and middle levels paying close attention to how well students are attaining and taking prompt action to reverse underperformance. Governance is satisfactory overall. Link governors and established committees engage with staff and this enables them to support and challenge. However, currently the school has a substantial financial deficit and a recovery plan is not yet in place. As a result, value for money is unsatisfactory. Progress on improving the issues identified in the last inspection has been good. This indicates that capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. Overall standards are average for A-level, but below for AS level. Achievement on level two courses is good, as is the achievement for A-level for the majority of students by the end of Year 13. Students' achievement at AS level is satisfactory. The sixth form has a positive ethos in which students enjoy their studies. Their personal development and well-being are good and the school offers a wide range of enrichment and other extra-curricular activities which enables students to participate in the wider community. The school has strong international links and groups of sixth formers travel to Africa to carry out voluntary work annually. Some sixth formers act as prefects in the lower school, while others support younger students with reading. The curriculum is good, offering a wide range of A-level courses. Additionally, the increase in level one and two vocational courses has had a positive impact on recruitment and retention. The quality of teaching and learning is good. However, there are some shortcomings, specifically in the match of work to students' abilities and in the use of challenging questions to develop higher order thinking skills. Care, guidance and support are good, as is students' attendance. Parents and students are involved in the review of progress, as part of an effective academic monitoring system. Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features and there is good capacity to improve. There is a clear understanding that standards could be higher and that teaching and learning need to be even more effective than they are at present.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that an effective plan is implemented to resolve the school's unsatisfactory financial position.
- Sharpen the quality of marking so that students consistently know how to improve their work, taking account of students' own views about their progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment on entry is broadly average. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are above average in English, mathematics and science. Standards remain above average by the end of Year 11. Overall, this represents good achievement from students' starting points. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also achieve well because of the support they receive. The progress made by students from Pakistani heritage has recently improved and is now good. This is the result of effective measures taken by the school to support their learning through mentoring, academic and personal guidance. Higher attaining students are now reaching their target grades, indicating that progress in English has improved and is now good. In

mathematics, progress is also good and improving. Solving mathematical problems is a relative weakness of average ability students. To improve these skills the school is providing more opportunities for them to use and apply their mathematical knowledge to answer questions that are more complex. Students make good progress in all other subjects, especially in single award science, geography, history and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' good attendance shows their sense of enjoyment of school and learning. Many support younger students who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and students contribute generously to charitable causes. Racial harmony is a strength. Students say that the few bullying or racist incidents are dealt with effectively. Behaviour is generally good and the great majority of parents' comments about behaviour are justifiably favourable. Around school, students are courteous and friendly. The low rate of exclusions demonstrates the school's determination and ability to care for all its students. A large number of students take part in a wide range of sporting activities, and the great majority make use of the healthy menus available at lunchtimes. The wide range of enrichment opportunities includes a number of residential visits, and visits to European countries. There are regular visits to cultural events locally, and many opportunities to meet people from other countries. Students are aware of the importance of their contribution to society as a whole. They appreciate the efforts of the school council on their behalf, but because this is not a democratically elected body, many feel remote from its influence and activities, and remain reluctant to volunteer or share responsibility. Where needed, students have the benefit of extra support so that almost all acquire the skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology as a preparation for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In the great majority of lessons harmonious classroom relationships, strengths in planning and the sharing of learning objectives and the effective use of plenary sessions underpin good and better learning. Students are eager to learn and they co-operate well in paired and group work. Teachers think carefully about the needs of lower-attaining students and those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. This results in matched teaching and in additional support so that students make good progress. Teachers assess students' progress accurately and most students are clear about the targets that are set for their learning. However, not all marking offers clear, consistent and constructive advice on how students could improve. A well-established programme of lesson observations informs leaders and helps to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. There is dissemination of effective practice, but the use of this strategy to lift satisfactory teaching to a better level is not fully developed. In less successful lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for students to show initiative and develop independence in their learning. In a very small minority of lessons, students make less progress where inexperienced or temporary teachers find it difficult to deal with low-level disruptive behaviour. However, this is being tackled with increasing success.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Based on a detailed understanding of the abilities and needs of individual students, the school has worked hard to develop a range of pathways at age 14, resulting in learning which is better personalised to their needs. Students benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which enables them to achieve well. Specialist Technology College Status has a good impact on the curriculum, for example, through the links with local businesses and other providers, so that students gain an understanding of work-related skills. A comprehensive programme of personal, social careers and citizenship education also prepares students well for the world of work. An extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities includes sporting activities, residential trips and visits that enrich students' experiences. The school has recently achieved the International School Award in recognition of the extent to which its work in this area has supported students' personal development and added to their enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Staff at all levels show a deep commitment to students' welfare and a careful tailoring of support enables students' specific, and sometimes, complex needs to be met very successfully. This includes support for the most vulnerable, those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are at an early stage of speaking English. Pupils' work is assessed regularly. Good communication between academic staff and form tutors ensures that students are generally well informed about their progress, but targets set in some subjects are not always sufficiently specific. Requirements to ensure students' safety are observed meticulously. Students feel safe and valued in school, a point reiterated by a very large number of parents. There are very well established links with other schools and colleges in the area, and students are given good advice about the choices and opportunities available in both Year 9 and Year 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Current senior leaders are very successful in ensuring that the needs of individuals and groups of students are central to the school's purpose, set within a strong Christian ethos. Systems for monitoring and review are well established and are effective in identifying and addressing underperformance. Self-evaluation at faculty level informs and influences whole school self-evaluation so that priorities for improving learning further are identified accurately. The views of parents and students also contribute to school evaluation. Day-to-day management of finances is satisfactory. However, there is a substantial financial deficit and, as a result, the school currently provides unsatisfactory value for money. The school, the local authority and the diocese are working to develop a plan to resolve the deficit. Governors work hard on behalf of the school and governance is satisfactory overall, notwithstanding the weakness, until recently, of their role in more rigorous financial accountability.

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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?	2	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?	2	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	3
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?	2	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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	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?	2	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	3
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	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	4	
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

22 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Nottingham Bluecoat School and Technology College, Nottingham, NG8 5GY

Many thanks for helping us with the inspection of your school. We were impressed with your warm welcome and the many positive things you had to say about your school.

We agree with you and the majority of your parents that Bluecoat is a good school. The senior staff of the school know what it does well, and why, and know what to do to make it even better in the future.

As you know, the school has students who represent a wide range of backgrounds and all of you make good progress. The same is true for those of you in the sixth form. You make good progress by the time you leave school because your performance is checked regularly and suitable action is taken to help you when you are falling behind. This leads to you attaining standards that are above average. Good teaching also contributes to your success. Clearly most of you enjoy your time in school. You show respect for racial and cultural diversity and attend regularly. You behave well around the school and in lessons but, occasionally, a small minority of you interrupt learning for the rest. We think senior staff are increasingly successful in dealing with this but need your cooperation. We judged that there are outstanding elements in the care and support you receive, as well as the curriculum offered. There is a strong sense that all of you matter as individuals and staff make sure that the provision is suited to your needs. You are encouraged to assess your work and, in the best examples, teachers give you feedback which shows you how to improve your work. However, we do not think that this is consistent across subjects and have asked the senior leaders to sharpen this up. Again, you can play your part by reflecting on what you need to do and acting on teachers' advice.

With all best wishes for your future.

Dilip Kadodwala

Her Majesty's Inspector