

The Trafalgar School at Downton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126447
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	315552
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola 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	487
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Bromage
Headteacher	Jenny Lawrie
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Breamore Road Downton Salisbury SP5 3HN
Telephone number	01725 510610
Fax number	01725 512841

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average and has slightly more boys than girls. The numbers on roll show a rising trend. About 90% of students are from White British backgrounds and the rest are from a wide range of others. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Some children in the area attend selective schools and, whilst the attainment on entry to this school is broadly average overall, fewer students than average start school with above average attainment. The school has a resourced base for physically impaired students and two currently attend. It has been a specialist school for performing and visual arts since September 2005.

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. Standards are rising and the rate of students' progress is increasing. Moreover, students, parents, staff and governors speak highly of the way in which students grow in confidence and have their aspirations raised whilst at the school. The outcomes for students, both academic and personal, show the positive impact of the school's work in improving the overall quality of provision from satisfactory at the time of the last inspection in December 2003 to good now.

Students' personal development is outstanding. Students are extremely polite and welcoming, view their futures positively, develop their workplace skills extremely well, and experience success across a range of fields, both academic and personal. They are encouraged in so many ways to see their potential and aim to achieve it. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are good. Students enjoy school enormously and, not surprisingly, cite favourite subjects as those where academic outcomes are best. The school's performing and visual arts specialism has contributed greatly to this personal development as well as enhancing educational provision as a whole. Students routinely speak, perform and show work in front of each other and learn to accept and respond to evaluations from peers and teachers with great grace.

GSCE examination results in 2007 were broadly average and there are clear signs that standards are set to rise further. Achievement is now good. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes outstanding. Lessons are well planned, conducted with very positive and supportive relationships, and with students concentrating and working well, in the main. A few lessons, however, lack pace or contain tasks that do not suitably challenge or engage all students or accurately meet their specific needs. The curriculum is good. The way in which students are cared for, supported and guided is also good. In particular, the school's process for welcoming new students from their primary schools, understanding their individual needs and abilities, and for helping them to settle quickly, is outstanding. This gives them a very secure start. The good systems for keeping a check on how well each student is doing in all areas of development continue throughout the school. Advice to students on how to improve their work, or reach the next grade or level is generally good but varies from class to class.

The headteacher and the senior team are highly effective. They are supported well by a team of middle managers who, in this small school, each carry many responsibilities. The school's self-evaluation processes are robust, and senior staff are fully aware of what is working well and what needs to be improved in a few places regarding the quality of provision and in leadership and management. The extent to which all subject leaders work effectively to drive up standards varies, however. Governance is good. Governors are knowledgeable and supportive. They are working well with senior staff to eliminate the current budget deficit and to provide indoor facilities for physical education, which are currently extremely limited. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use existing expertise, from within the school or elsewhere, to ensure that more lessons are of the quality of the best.
- Develop further the leadership and management skills of some team leaders so that they focus more closely on evaluating students' learning, and make good use of data to promote high standards and achievement
- Work to improve the school's accommodation for physical education.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Improvements in achievement and standards are clearly visible in test and examination results and in current students' work.

GCSE examination results in 2007 were broadly average and showed that the students had made good progress overall from Year 7 to Year 11, although progress in mathematics was not as strong as in English. Relative to other subjects students took, results were best in design and technology, English literature, physical education, history, geography and science. Students speak of their enjoyment of these subjects and art. School records show that GCSE results are expected to rise further in 2008. Results in the end of Year 9 national tests were average in 2006 and rose in 2007. Results in English are still broadly average but those in mathematics and science are higher. These outcomes show a marked increase in the overall rate of students' progress in Years 7 to 9 from that in previous years.

Because the school as a whole keeps such a close check on students' progress, very few students underachieve and then for very specific reasons. Variations in achievement across the different sub-groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are not generally marked. Boys' progress was, however, better than girls' as shown in the 2007 GCSE examination results. The few students in that year who had statements of special educational needs, or who were looked after, made particularly good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students speak extremely positively about the school and enjoy it enormously. The atmosphere in the school is inspiringly warm and friendly and students are consistently courteous and considerate. Students grow in confidence because of the way they are expected to contribute and share views, comment on each other's work, and respond thoughtfully to the supportive criticism. Students' above average attendance, extremely good punctuality, very positive outlooks and attitudes to work, coupled with good academic progress, show excellent development of workplace and other skills that will serve them so well in the future.

Students say that there is little bullying in the school and that the few incidences are dealt with effectively. Behaviour is good. A few parents have some concerns about low-level disruption, which does exist in a very small number of lessons. The numbers of permanent and fixed-term exclusions are low.

Students contribute well to the school and wider community and some act willingly as peer mentors and prefects in support of younger or vulnerable students. School council members take their responsibilities very seriously, and the school listens to and acts on their views. Students are encouraged to lead safe and healthy lifestyles through, for example, physical education lessons focusing on the importance of regular exercise, and the highly successful Citizenship Days. They show a serious and positive response to the advice given. The Citizenship Days and other activities, primarily those associated with the school specialism in performing and visual arts, enable students to develop well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, and there are examples of outstanding practice in a range of subjects. Lessons start very briskly, and with all students well equipped and ready to learn. Relationships are strong and supportive as demonstrated in the way work is talked about, displayed or performed, with constructive criticism given, by both teachers and students, in support of learning. Most teachers are very clear about what each student can achieve. This information is shared with students who, in turn, are aware of their learning gains and what needs to be done to reach the next grade or level. In most lessons, pace is good, and activities engage and interest students. Even when this is not the case, students' behaviour does not generally falter and disruptions to lessons are rare. Older students value and respond to the 'Tick-Star-Cross' system through which their progress is kept under review. Some good examples of high quality marking and verbal advice were seen during the inspection but also some more limited responses. Students show pride in their work, as seen in many confident contributions to lessons and well kept exercise books but this can vary with some books showing a lack of care.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum very successfully promotes students' personal development as well as good academic progress. The 'Building Learning Power' courses in Years 7 and 8 usefully extend students' repertoire of learning skills and their understanding of how they learn best. The broad and balanced curriculum is successfully enhanced by regular 'Citizenship Days' and an Arts Week. The school is working to develop vocational courses as provision is currently limited. Nevertheless, the curriculum still provides well for students of all levels of ability and contributes in many excellent ways to students' future economic well-being and to their growth as confident young people. Arrangements for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and particularly for those few students with physical impairment, are good through well targeted and well planned support. The school is aware that opportunities for gifted and talented students, whilst existing in places, are less well developed. There is an impressive programme of extra-curricular activities which are well supported. Some trips and visits enrich the timetabled curriculum. The 'Key Homeworks' comprise many well planned, profitable and sometimes challenging activities. These are hugely beneficial in encouraging students to develop their study and research skills amongst others. The homework programme does not, however, provide enough in the way of 'bite-size pieces', as one parent put it, through which students can routinely reinforce or extend their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good and praised by the vast majority of parents. Transition from primary school is outstanding, resulting in students settling very quickly and happily into life at their new school. This is reflected in very positive attitudes amongst students and the growing numbers in the school in recent years. It also ensures that any vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and have access to the good quality advice and support provided by the school and external agencies. The school's

procedures for child protection are secure. Students feel safe and well cared for, and there is always a trusted adult to turn to if they need help. The school's system of rewards and sanctions, in the form of commendations or cautions, is very effective in encouraging good work and behaviour other than in a few lessons. Effective procedures for monitoring attendance and tackling absence from school have led to significant improvements since the last inspection.

The school works successfully to raise students' aspirations by setting them challenging targets. The academic guidance provided for students in most lessons is very good, and in some cases outstanding. Many students and parents praise the 'Tick-Star-Cross' system through which students' progress is frequently reviewed in Years 10 and 11. This system is being extended to other years. Students are generally clear about their current levels of attainment and what they need to do to make further progress. Good support and guidance ensure that students make informed choices when choosing GCSE options, as well as post-16 choices on further education, employment or training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

School improvement is clearly at the heart of the work of leaders and managers. The school's drive to raise standards and achievement has been, and is being, successful. Pivotal to the many positive changes that have occurred since the last inspection is the effective use of data about students' progress and attainment. The school motivates students to strive to achieve at their highest possible level which, for some, is higher than they may have believed possible. Many parents praise the school for the way it keeps them informed about their child's progress and takes account of parents' views, but some feel more could be done.

The restructuring of the middle level of leadership has been innovative with heads of houses and heads of faculty leading the same team of tutors and subject teachers with a view to developing consistently high quality teaching and learning. Many good strategies for this are already in place. These include frequent and formal 'drop-ins' to lessons by heads of faculty and senior staff, as part of the school's good performance management systems. In this small school, some subject teaching or leadership is entirely in the hands of one teacher and the house/faculty system supports such individuals and others well. There are examples of high quality subject leadership but this is not universally the case. Some relative weaknesses exist and senior leaders are aware of them, and tackling them.

Governors and senior leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a clear vision for its future development. The budget deficit is expected to be cleared by April 2009. Strategies for improvement are clearly identified, but action plans are not always broken down into measurable and time-referenced objectives. Issues for improvement identified by the last inspection report have been successfully addressed, except for the provision of indoor accommodation for physical education. In view of these improvements, and because standards and achievement have risen, the school has demonstrated good capacity to improve.

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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?	2
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	1
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	1

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?	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?	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	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
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 The Trafalgar School at Downton, Wiltshire SP5 3HN

Thank you for welcoming us on our recent visit to your school. We appreciate the conversations we had with many of you, including some members of the school council. I would like to tell you about our findings.

You are right to be proud of this good school and of your good achievements. We could see that the school is improving and that standards are rising. The GCSE results in 2007 were similar to those nationally and school records show that the results in 2008 are likely to be higher. A particularly impressive feature about the school is the way that it helps you become confident and courteous young people who see the future positively, and who are extremely well prepared to take a place in the world of work and in life beyond school in general. Your personal development is outstanding.

The school provides you with a good education and it is clear that you enjoy it greatly. Most lessons are good and some are excellent. Just occasionally, your learning is more limited because lesson activities are not well paced or not properly suited to your needs. Most teachers help you to understand how well you are doing and how to improve. The school keeps a good check on your progress so that you do not get left behind. You get good advice and support over personal matters and about your next stages in work or learning. The way that the school helps new students settle into Year 7 is excellent.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors are highly effective. Most other leaders are also clear about how to improve the school further. We have asked the school to do three things to make the school even better. These are:

- to ensure that more lessons are as good as the best
- to help some subject leaders to keep a closer check on how much you learn
- to work to improve the school's accommodation for physical education.

I wish you all the very best for your time at school and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola Her Majesty's Inspector

21 January 2008



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