

Churchmead Church of England (VA) School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133580
Local Authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	319571
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	492
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Mr R Evans board
Headteacher	Mrs G Goodman
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
School address	Priory Way Datchet Slough SL3 9JQ
Telephone number	08444 772446
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average comprehensive takes the majority of its students from the borough of Slough, which operates a selective secondary system. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is higher than that found nationally. The most significant numbers are of Asian British heritage; there is also a higher than average proportion of students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The majority of these students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. At the last inspection, the school was given a notice to improve because of concerns about students' progress and aspects of leadership and management. There were also concerns about the viability of the sixth form. Since then, the school has suspended its provision for sixth form students. Some sixth form students are still taught on the Churchmead site, but all are currently registered with Slough Grammar School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Churchmead has improved since its last inspection and now provides a satisfactory standard of education. Therefore, in accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school has made good progress this year, not least because of the strong support provided by the local authority, the diocese and external consultants.

Improved monitoring and self-evaluation enables the senior leadership team to focus clearly on the impact of the school's work on students' achievement and personal development. They have implemented three key initiatives that have successfully raised standards - targeting individual students in need of support, improving behaviour management and developing the curriculum. A good system for tracking students' progress enables staff to identify underachieving students and provide intensive support to improve their work. Similarly, students who have difficulty in controlling their behaviour and are at risk of exclusion are identified. They receive effective support through a course in social and emotional aspects of learning and good links with external support agencies. Effective in-class support helps ensure that these pupils are achieving satisfactorily. Exclusions have fallen significantly and students' attitudes to school are more positive. Some parents still express concerns about students' behaviour but the school provides an orderly environment where students trust staff and feel safe. Students now enjoy their education more because the curriculum is better suited to their needs and interests. They speak with particular enthusiasm about their courses in drama, art, photography and business studies. An increasing range of vocational courses is motivating more students and helping to raise standards in Years 10 and 11.

These developments have helped the school to recover from very poor examination results in 2007. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are still below average, but these students have made up a lot of the ground they lost in previous years. Students in Years 7 and 10, who began their courses after the school was given a notice to improve, are on track to reach standards in line with the national average. As a result, achievement is now satisfactory, for students from all backgrounds, including those of Asian British heritage. Students' personal development is also satisfactory. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community through charity fund raising. At the suggestion of the school council, a 'blue angels' peer mentoring group supports Year 7 students. Students are enthusiastic about the wide range of sporting activities available to them and appreciative of the healthy meals provided in the canteen. They develop satisfactory workplace skills, although they have limited opportunities for working as a member of a group in lessons.

The senior management team recognises the importance of building on recent improvements. They rightly see the quality of teaching and learning as the key to achieving this. Close monitoring by senior management has ensured that the large majority of lessons are at least satisfactory. However, there are still not enough good lessons to raise standards further. Not all teachers plan their lessons precisely enough, and make clear the learning objectives. Consequently, students are uncertain about what they should achieve. They do not have consistent opportunities to evaluate their own work and identify what they need to do to improve. This is partly because subject leaders do not monitor their areas of responsibility closely enough and reinforce a common approach to lesson planning and teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the recent improvements in students' standards and achievement by increasing the proportion of good teaching.
- Ensure that teachers set clear learning objectives, and involve students more in assessing their own learning.
- Develop the skills of middle managers in monitoring, evaluating and improving their areas of responsibility.

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 enter the school with broadly average standards, although there are relatively few high attaining students. In recent years, they have not achieved as well as they should during their time in the school. In 2007, GCSE results were below average, with only 41% of students gaining the higher A* to C grades. Results in National Curriculum tests were exceptionally low. These results reflected the standards that were reported in the last inspection, after which the school was given a notice to improve. Since then, there has been significant improvement. Improved, accurate tracking of students' progress has enabled teachers to identify many who were underachieving. They have provided intensive support and revision programmes for many students, especially in Years 9 and 11. As a result, their predicted levels and grades have greatly improved. Improvements to the curriculum have also had a positive effect, in that many students are now following vocational courses that are better matched to their needs and interests. These developments have not yet fully compensated for the legacy of underachievement from previous years, so that standards are still below average. Over the last year, however, achievement is satisfactory and students in all years are now reaching realistically challenging targets. The school has successfully closed the gap in attainment between boys and girls, which was noted at the time of the last inspection. Boys are now achieving as well as girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Some aspects of students' personal development, notably behaviour, show appreciable improvement. While there remains some behaviour that disrupts learning in lessons, this tends to be in classes where there have been frequent changes of teacher. Students feel safe in school, partly because of improved behaviour and partly because they know that adults in the school are protective of them and do their best to deal with any anxieties. Their spiritual, moral social and cultural development is satisfactory, with particular strengths in their moral and social development. They show respect for the values of others and feel a real sense of responsibility for their fellow students' welfare and happiness. Students enjoy school because they feel that teachers have their interests at heart and take their views seriously. They enjoy the relationships they have with other students and with their teachers. They also enjoy lessons when they are interesting but are disappointed that some fail to grip their attention. Attendance is broadly average, although for a minority of pupils it is very erratic.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection the standard of teaching has improved, leading to better overall progress. The school's own monitoring of teaching and learning shows that the large majority of lessons are satisfactory, but a few remain inadequate. Some good and occasionally outstanding teaching was seen, notably in art and physical education. In these lessons, teachers' planning is very precise. Students are made aware of the purpose of activities, are taken along at a good pace, know their learning targets and are included in the assessment of their progress. They are therefore in a good position to know how well they are doing and to enjoy a sense of purpose, achievement and engagement. However, this good planning and use of assessment is inconsistent. In some weaker lessons, often taught by less experienced or temporary staff, students mark time. They are not challenged to work at a fast enough pace and are unclear about what would count as success. This is also the case in relation to some teachers' responses to written work. Too few students benefit from regular and detailed marking which sets out targets for their improvement – a point raised, incidentally, by a number of parents. Students' behaviour in lessons is similarly improved because relationships with teachers are generally positive. Teachers manage behaviour well, so that classrooms are settled and orderly places.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are a number of good features. Considerable efforts have been made to develop a vocational pathway for older students to meet their interests and ambitions more effectively. These have been successful initiatives, as shown both by the number of students opting for work-related courses and by the substantial improvements in standards achieved. Good links with local colleges extend the curriculum, but the school is sensibly basing as many vocational courses as possible 'in house' in order to optimise students' chances of success. Another good feature is the number and range of extracurricular activities, which students sign up for in large numbers. The strong sporting element supports the school's emphasis on healthy living. Art, music and drama are established and popular subjects that support students' cultural development well. Students' good attendance at frequent revision classes gives evidence of their improved attitudes to learning and a growing commitment to doing as well as possible academically. Provision for information and communication technology, literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. This enables students to learn important skills that support their work in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good pastoral care for students. Staff have been particularly successful in helping students with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties to manage their own behaviour. In order to make this help as effective as possible the school works closely with a very wide range of outside agencies and organisations. Support is tailored to meet closely identified needs. For example, a unit of work entitled 'Respect' was originally written to support the personal and social development of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students. It does this successfully. However, it has also been adapted for use with other students who have problems with understanding cultures other than their own. The school carefully and systematically

monitors the impact of its support on students' personal development. It demonstrates a significant improvement in behaviour and attitudes and an impressive reduction in the number of students being excluded from school.

The academic guidance given to students is satisfactory but inconsistent. Strong individual mentoring and revision programmes have accelerated the progress of underachieving students in Years 9 and 11. Some speak about their targets confidently, and are beginning to understand what they need to do to improve their work. However, the level of information and advice given to students varies. Some have insufficient understanding of how much progress they are making, and what are the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has responded well to the strong support provided by the diocese, local authority and consultant headteacher. The senior management team has been strengthened. Senior managers are energetic, professional and work well together as a dedicated team. They have kept a clear and successful focus on important areas for development. For example, improved behaviour management policies, targeted intervention for underachieving students and curriculum developments. These have resulted in the necessary improvements in standards and achievement. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. It is rightly based on the impact of initiatives on students' progress and personal development. However, some middle managers do not have a firm grasp of procedures for monitoring and improving provision in their areas of responsibility. For example, heads of department do not follow a common policy for monitoring teaching and learning in their subjects.

An interim executive board has recently been formed to replace the governing body. With strong leadership from a well-informed chair, the board has a firm grasp of what is needed to sustain current progress. It provides very good support and challenge. Difficulties in appointing staff continue to hold back developments in some areas, but overall the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

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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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	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?	3
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?	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
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
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
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 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Churchmead Church of England (VA) School, Slough, SL3 9JQ

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. You expressed your views well. Many of you rightly enjoy the opportunities that the school provides. Our main finding is that the school provides you with a satisfactory education. The school has improved since the last inspection and with your help it can become even better.

The best things about the school are that:

- your teachers are working hard and successfully to help those of you who had fallen behind with your work to catch up
- the school provides a good range of courses for you to choose from in Years 10 and 11
- many of you have improved your behaviour so that everyone can work better in lessons.

To improve your school further we have asked staff to do three main things:

- increase the amount of good teaching and learning so that you make faster progress and reach higher standards
- improve lesson planning and involve you more in working out how well you are learning in lessons
- help some staff with management responsibilities to work out how well their departments are doing.

Of course, some of these improvements - and especially the second one - will only work if you are prepared to take responsibility yourselves. The more you want to learn and get involved in your learning, the better you will do. Many of you already do so and we hope that you will be joined by others in the future.

Yours sincerely,

William Robson

Lead Inspector