

Castle High School and Visual Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103867
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	323919
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Jones

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 (total)	1055
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Marsh
Headteacher	T Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	St James's Road Dudley DY1 3JE
Telephone number	01384 816045
Fax number	01384 816046

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Castle High School is a specialist college in the Visual Arts situated in the centre of Dudley. Many families in the area are disadvantaged. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is more than twice the national average, and an above average proportion speak English as an additional language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average. The school has close links with the local community through its specialist college status and its role as an extended school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Castle High School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Students join the school with below average attainment. They make satisfactory progress and results at Key Stages 3 and 4 are below average. Academic targets set by the school are met, including the target for the number of students achieving five good GCSE passes, but that target is not challenging enough. The specialist Visual Arts College status of the school has led to exceptionally high standards in art, with students making rapid progress, some of them achieving success at A level as well as GCSE.

Students' personal and social development is good. They generally enjoy school, feel safe and well cared for, and cooperate with each other and their teachers. Although attendance is below the national average, it has improved a little in recent months. The school undertakes rigorous monitoring and participates in government supported initiatives, including targeting groups of poor attenders and taking legal action where necessary.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some examples of outstanding and good teaching, as well as a small minority which is inadequate. Teaching is based on secure subject knowledge, well-deployed teaching resources and good relationships with students. It is not always focused enough on meeting the individual needs of students or on making sure they understand the next steps to improve their work. The curriculum is satisfactory and encourages students' personal development, particularly through the rich experience they gain of the visual arts through the school's specialism. The growing number of vocational courses is meeting students' learning needs appropriately. Pastoral care is effective and the school works well with external agencies to provide support and guidance. The safeguarding of students is secure. Students know about their academic target levels but they do not always know how to reach them.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school is well managed day to day, and its specialist status has helped to promote a positive ethos and secure the school's role in developing effective community cohesion. The governing body has played a helpful role in supporting the school's development as part of the local community. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Recent changes to the senior leadership team have been effective in supporting improvement. The school is beginning to manage the systematic analysis of data on student performance with more rigour, but this has not been accurate enough over the last few years. Improvements at all levels to the evaluation and management of teaching and learning have now been put in place but have yet to impact on standards and achievement. The school has the capacity to make satisfactory improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- What the school should do to improve further
- Put in place rigorous analysis and interpretation of performance data to improve target-setting, increase the challenge provided and raise standards and achievement.
- Develop effective leadership and management skills at all levels focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.

A small proportion of the schools where 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 join and leave the school with below average standards, having made satisfactory progress. There are differences in the achievement of different groups of students in different years, so for example, girls performed well in 2007 but under-performed in 2008. This reflects the school's weak analysis of students' progress and targeting of support in the past. The school meets most of its targets for performance, which are adequately challenging, but the target for the proportion leaving school with five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is too low to drive up standards. Progress in art is exceptionally good, as the school makes such good use of its specialist status. Progress in English and mathematics is satisfactory. It is weaker in mathematics than in English, because the school struggles to recruit specialist teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students have good relationships with adults and with each other, and they enjoy school, particularly when lessons include a mix of stimulating activities. They work safely in lessons and feel the school is a secure environment. Students show good social skills and are friendly and welcoming to visitors.

A minority of parents expressed concern over incidents of both bullying and behaviour within the school. Inspectors judge that behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. Students say bullying is rare and when it happens it is effectively dealt with. Successful strategies to support behaviour have resulted in a marked reduction in the number of exclusions. The school has made strenuous efforts to improve attendance, identifying and targeting groups and individual students where attendance is particularly poor, and resorting to legal action in extreme cases. Attendance is below the national average, but is improving slowly and has moved up slightly recently.

Students feel their views are listened to and acted on, as for example when the school council was involved in the recent reorganisation of timings of the school day. The school has achieved the National Healthy Eating Award (Platinum). Students are aware of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle and speak highly of the food from the school dining room. There is good participation in the wide range of sporting activities and creative art opportunities out of hours. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The religious studies programme effectively promotes understanding and tolerance of religious and cultural differences which are evident in the culturally diverse school community. The school's art specialism supports the students' appreciation of cross-cultural diversity, influences the ethos of the school and is a strength. An effective work experience programme and work related opportunities ensure that students develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being, although basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) are not well enough developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons range from outstanding to a small minority that are inadequate. Regular monitoring of teaching identifies areas for development and provides

targeted professional support. However, the focus in lesson observations concentrates too much on teaching rather than how students learn.

The school has a committed, caring staff who develop good relationships with their students. This is reflected in students' confidence in their teachers and helps them to engage in classroom activities. Teaching is based on excellent subject knowledge; for example, in a Year 11 history lesson on votes for women, probing questioning and high levels of challenge enabled students to have a very clear awareness and understanding of Suffragists and Suffragettes, and the differences between the two. Teaching resources are used well, with some highly effective use of interactive whiteboards to support learning.

Despite these good features, teaching does not always focus well enough on helping students become effective independent learners or on providing work that is well matched to individual needs. Not all students are clear about what they are expected to learn or how to improve their work. The quality of marking is inconsistent across the school. Whilst good use is made of praise it does not focus sufficiently on how students can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum that is responsive to local needs and encourages students' personal development. The school uses its Visual Arts specialist status to provide a good range of art courses, including Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and GCSE as well as A level. Students' personal development is enhanced by the provision of frequent and valuable experience of working with artists, visiting galleries and involvement in local art initiatives. The number of vocational courses, enterprise and work-related opportunities has increased satisfactorily since the last inspection. The introduction of a helpful range of new BTEC courses offers students appropriate pathways into training and employment. Enrichment and out-of-hours learning offer a wide variety of activities which students value highly. Provision for basic skills including across subjects is satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The pastoral support given to students is a strength of the school. The free Breakfast Club, support for Muslim students during Ramadan and a growing range of community activities are positive initiatives which target the needs of students well. The school works effectively with a wide range of external agencies to give additional support and guidance to students and their families. Health and safety procedures are in place, and child protection procedures are clear and widely understood. The school provides systematic support for vulnerable students. The school ensures that progression routes after school are clear and well established. Advice and support for options courses are linked well with the Connexions careers provider. Twice-yearly review days allow targets to be set and discussed with parents. Students are aware of their academic target levels but guidance on how to reach them is not effective enough. The tracking of students' progress is inconsistent and is not yet fully in place across the school. The 15 minute registration sessions with form tutors are not sufficiently used for the provision of care, support and guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The highly committed headteacher has led the school through a period of change, including the transition to specialist status, which has a positive impact on the school, supports local primary schools and enhances community cohesion. The school has made recent and effective changes to its senior leadership team, but the team does not yet have the capacity to provide more than satisfactory improvement. The school has monitored and evaluated its own performance in some, but not all, respects. The impact of self-evaluation has been limited because not enough has been done to evaluate the performance of students. The school is now beginning to carry out more systematic analysis of data on student performance, but this has not been done with enough rigour over the past few years.

Recent moves to focus on better evaluation and management of teaching and learning at whole-school and departmental level are improving the quality of teaching, but this has yet to have a large enough impact on standards and achievement. The school's links with local services and agencies are good, and help to promote students' well-being. The governing body gives effective support and asks critical questions, and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

. 26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Castle High School and Visual Arts College, Dudley, DY1 3JE

Thank you for welcoming us to your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your work.

We found that the school is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education. Your standards and achievement are satisfactory. Most of you said that you enjoy coming to school and that you felt the school was a welcoming and secure place. We saw for ourselves that you work well with each other and your teachers, and that your behaviour around the school is good. Your teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and they often make the lessons interesting and fun, although sometimes they do not do enough to make sure you know what to do to improve. The work you do in art is outstanding and you really benefit from having artists in school and very good art facilities. We found that the school looks after you well, and gives you the support and guidance you need to stay happy and focused on your work. We know that Mr Johnson and his staff team have worked hard to provide you with an enjoyable and friendly school, but we have asked them to make a few changes to improve your performance and help you progress more quickly. We have asked the school to:

- Put in place analysis and interpretation of performance data to improve target-setting and raise standards and achievement.
- Develop effective leadership and management skills at all levels focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.

We think you can play your part in this by making sure that all of you attend school regularly, and by taking note of the advice teachers give you on how to improve your work. We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Jones Lead inspector