

Boston Spa School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108091
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	324705
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Bowles 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1805
Sixth form	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Hall
Headteacher	Mr C Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2006
School address	Clifford Moor Road Boston Spa Wetherby West Yorkshire LS23 6RW
Telephone number	01937 846636
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Age group	11–19
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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

Boston Spa School is a large comprehensive school serving urban and village communities on the eastern fringes of Leeds. Students come from a wide range of social backgrounds. One in ten students is eligible for free school meals, which is below average, although the school has evidence that economic disadvantage affects about one quarter of students' families. The great majority of students stay at the school throughout their secondary schooling. An increasing proportion continues into the sixth form. Most students are White British, and there are small numbers from Indian, Pakistani, Caribbean and African backgrounds. For nearly all, English is their first language.

The school has had specialist sports college status for nine years. It holds the Sportsmark Gold Award, the Sports Partnership Mark and the Football Association Charter Standard Award for Sports Colleges at county, regional and national levels. It also holds the Advanced Healthy Schools Award and Safe Mark. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust recognised its improvement in achievement in both 2007 and 2008. It is recognised as an Investor in Pupils and an Investor in People, and has an award for Education Business Partnership.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Boston Spa is a satisfactory and improving school with good features. The clear, determined leadership of the acting headteacher, ably supported by the senior team, has secured improvements in the curriculum and the care, support and guidance of students. These are good and are having an increasingly positive impact on most students' achievement and enjoyment, demonstrating a good capacity to improve further. The specialism makes a strong contribution to the quality of education provided by the school by successfully promoting active and responsible lifestyles and developing opportunities for student leadership. The school provides sound value for money. However, in this very large school the impact of initiatives has taken time to be felt across all areas. The quality of teaching and learning is currently satisfactory rather than consistently good. Monitoring of students' progress and support for those who need it are having a positive impact on learning and outcomes for individuals. Yet information about students' participation and achievement is not currently used as well as it could be to evaluate the impact of initiatives and so accelerate improvement in areas where it is hardest to secure.

Students enter the school with above average standards and make satisfactory progress as they move through the school to reach above average standards by the end of Year 11. Students' standards in tests at the end of Year 9 are above average, although too few reach the highest levels. After a dip in 2006, recent GCSE results show that progress has accelerated in Years 10 and 11, especially for the more able. In GCSE examinations in 2008 an above average proportion of students attained five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Standards in English were above average. For the first time in three years, Year 11 students' overall achievement was clearly satisfactory. However, students with lower prior attainment continued to make less than expected progress, especially if they did not attend regularly. The improvement in achievement has been slower to materialise for this group, but the school's own analysis of assessment data shows that most students, including those with lower starting points, are on track to reach their challenging targets this year.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but too variable and consequently, in some lessons, students are not achieving as they might. In good and outstanding lessons students clearly enjoy being well involved and stretched. In less successful lessons assessment information is not used well to match tasks to students' different abilities. As a result, there is too little challenge and the pace of learning slows; some lose interest, and, occasionally, do not cooperate with teachers.

Parents appreciate the good care given to students and the commitment teachers make to extra activities. Students spoken to say that the school is a fair and friendly place and that staff encourage them to develop their interests and talents and help them through difficult times. Students' progress is tracked regularly. They have targets to aim for and, if they need it, help is provided to reach these targets. Students' personal development is good overall. They are very clear about how to stay healthy and large numbers take part a varied range of health-promoting activities, which offer something for everyone. Students' good basic skills prepare them well for the world of work. They are keen to take on responsibilities and contribute to the community. Attendance is average. There is a little low-level disruption in lessons, but most students show positive attitudes to learning and are good at managing their own behaviour around the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students in the sixth form benefit from a good-quality education. They can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses at different levels, reflecting the varied interests and aspirations of the growing number of students who choose to enter the sixth form. The school works hard to take into account the needs of individual students and well-considered modifications to the good and continually developing curriculum meet the needs of students. Staff carefully advise their choices and guide their progress. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is consistently good. Teachers' thorough planning and skilful delivery takes into account the range of students' needs and interests. Students confirm that there is increased emphasis on active and independent learning. They welcome this and are well aware of what they need to do to meet their agreed targets. As a result, the great majority of students complete the courses they start, and students are very positive about the support they are given.

Standards are now above average and achievement is good. There has been some variation between subjects. Students achieve well in media studies, English literature, physical education, biology and chemistry. Students have achieved less well in economics, music and Spanish, but the school has taken appropriate action to redress these failings and improvements are now being seen. Teaching is currently consistently good, illustrating how good leadership and management is sustaining and developing the quality of provision. Good care, guidance and support ensure that students' progress towards their targets in subjects is monitored carefully. When causes for concern are identified, intervention is timely and effective. Tutors support students very well with their personal development and attendance. Students are very appreciative of the good support and guidance they receive through the regular progress reviews. They are adamant that the willingness of teachers to support them makes an important contribution to their positive attitudes and aspirations as well as to their performance in examinations. Sixth formers' personal development and well-being are good. Their enjoyment of learning is high. Students develop as mature and personable individuals who take up opportunities to contribute to the community and develop their leadership skills. They are proud of their school and feel respected and valued.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of students in Key Stages 3 and 4, especially those who start with lower levels of attainment.
- Reduce the variability in the quality of teaching and learning in the main part of the school, by making sure assessment information is used in all classrooms to ensure good challenge for all students.
- Make better use of information about students' progress to evaluate the impact of initiatives on different groups.

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 entering the school have achieved results at primary school which are above the national average. Standards in tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11 have also been above

average. The school reports improved performance against specialist college targets. However, given their starting points, students' achievement was unsatisfactory in 2006. Since a turning point in 2007 more than the national average number of students has attained five GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Standards have risen for two years running and last year students' progress by the time they reached the end of Year 11 was clearly satisfactory. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to achieve satisfactorily.

The significant improvements in achievement and standards in the past two years resulted mainly from setting challenging targets and monitoring progress towards them, with interventions to accelerate progress. However, the impact to date has not been equal for different groups of students. As the school recognises, progress by the end of Year 9 has yet to improve. Improvements are emerging more slowly for the less able. In 2008, while students who had joined the school with higher levels of attainment achieved better than expected, the less numerous lower prior attainers achieved below expectations. The difference was more marked for lower-attaining boys. Higher-attaining boys achieved well. The proportion attaining five pass grades at GCSE remains in line with the national average. The gap in attainment is narrowing more slowly for students who receive free school meals than their peers, although it looks likely to narrow further in the current year. Another promising sign is that, this year, about two thirds of students with lower prior attainment are on track to meet challenging targets, according to the school's regular progress tracking.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school provides a secure, caring environment where pupils are confident and able to develop good skills and qualities. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are good overall. Students are polite and work well together. Behaviour around the school is good. Attendance is average. Students report that they feel safe and that they are confident they have someone to go to if they have problems with relationships. Some parents and students are concerned about disruptive behaviour in lessons. The school has responded and can demonstrate success in changing the negative attitudes of a decreasing minority.

The sports college programme has given healthy living a high profile. Students understand about how to lead healthy lifestyles and all take an accredited course in physical education. Activities such as karate have been used to attract a broader mix of students to regular exercise. Many students are involved with sports leadership programmes. All students develop an understanding of what it means to be a good citizen. Students are involved in staff appointment procedures and there are good opportunities to take responsibility. For example, a Year 10 student showed great confidence in leading an assembly for Year 7 students on health and safety. Arrangements to enable students to routinely discuss and affect school life have been revised to re-emphasise the core aims of the school, but are too new to show impact.

Students work well in teams when given the opportunities and are developing the skills they will need in the future. Work-placements are well used to broaden students' experiences.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. As a consequence, students make the progress expected of them. The overall quality is not quite as high as the school's monitoring indicates. Teachers have good subject knowledge, relate well to students and usually manage behaviour effectively. However, in many lessons there is a lack of opportunity to develop independent learning skills. Good teaching was seen which engaged students early in lessons and challenged them to work to their potential in well-structured tasks. Occasionally teaching was outstanding. Teachers assess accurately and targets are challenging. There is some good use of assessment data to inform lesson planning and guide students clearly about how to improve, but there is inconsistency between departments in this regard. Too many lessons were satisfactory rather than good. In these lessons teachers did not provide the opportunities for students of all abilities to move forward at a strong pace, sometimes because they talked for too long to the entire class. Occasionally, where challenge was weakest, students lost interest and behaviour deteriorated, so lessons were inadequate.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection. Provision is now more personalised and teaching time has been increased to 25 hours a week. The wider range of academic and enrichment opportunities has had a good effect on students' enjoyment of school, and is beginning to make a positive difference to achievement, though it is too early to see full impact.

Different routes give students flexibility to follow a curriculum appropriate to their individual needs. In Year 7 students are taught in three bands and there is specialised provision for those with lower prior attainment. A new programme in Year 7 is showing early signs of having a positive impact on students' personal effectiveness. A range of pathways, incorporating academic and vocational courses, leads from Year 9 through to the sixth form. In Year 9 students can follow accelerated courses, including BTEC physical education and GCSE humanities. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been enhanced and in Year 9 all students begin a course leading to two GCSE qualifications. The more able students can study triple science and follow an AS level mathematics course in Year 11. Good links with schools and colleges have extended the curriculum to include, for example, hair and beauty, and motor vehicle mechanics. A partnership with a local special school provides specialised support for Year 9 students at risk of underachievement. Alternative in-house and outreach courses exist for vulnerable students and their families, while additional support is provided by the Integrated Student Services team for students with poor literacy skills or specific learning difficulties. Vocational diploma courses in the sport and leisure, and travel and tourism diplomas will begin in 2010. A new business coordinator is enhancing the school's business links and its already strong careers education and guidance. Students are well prepared for work experience in Year 10. Guidance for options choices in Year 9 and Year 11 is good and retention rates from Year 11 into the sixth form are high. Altogether, 96% of students in 2008 progressed to further education, employment or training. Many students take part in a rich and varied programme of enrichment activities, including a wealth of sport, music, drama, educational and teambuilding trips.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares well for its students. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government requirements. There are good procedures for the early identification of students who are causing concern, through regular monitoring of attendance, behaviour and progress. These students are provided with effective, individually tailored programmes and, where necessary, good links are made with other agencies to provide appropriate support. As a result, exclusions have been reduced, students are achieving better and the number of students not going on to education, training or employment after school has been significantly reduced. The school 'goes the extra mile' for difficult-to-engage students and parents. For example, outreach programmes take place in a community centre to provide a neutral and more convenient location for parents. Students who may have problems of self-esteem or lack personal confidence are provided with thoughtful programmes to enable them to develop their personal skills. The school is trying many different strategies to reduce student absence, and these have improved overall attendance.

The systems for the frequent assessment of all students' attainment are now embedded and used to provide individual support where underachievement is identified. The provision of comprehensive information for discussion on review days is improving the links with parents. Students report that they are very clear about how well they are doing. They are set challenging targets for the future and this is aiding the drive to improve standards. However, the school does not routinely use available information to look for patterns in the progress of different groups of students, or to measure the success of student interventions. This misses an opportunity to improve the systems of intervention and indicate the focus for future improvement.

There are good procedures to support pupils when they start at the school and when they leave or move on to further study. Students in Year 7 say they felt confident and happy about coming to the school and valued the links to 'buddies' in older year groups. Older students receive good careers advice and guidance on future study or employment opportunities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with good features. The school has kept a firm focus on students' standards and progress and has pursued a clear agenda for improvement through a time of change in senior leadership. The acting headteacher and senior leaders have worked effectively together to tackle areas where improvement was most needed. Most notably, they have used challenging targets to establish a pattern of rising standards and rapidly improving progress by most students on most fronts, indicating a good capacity to improve further. Governors are well informed and conscientious in helping the school to test its self-evaluation. In the sixth form, evaluation of provision is very thorough and has sustained improvement. The sports specialism is well led, and is being used strategically to influence the school as a whole. Strategies which have proved effective in sport and physical education are being introduced in other areas of school life, with evidence of positive impact in areas which have needed it most. These include, for example, promoting achievement and giving students more responsibility for leading learning and handling relationships. The school has made a thoughtful and sincere start on improving community cohesion. It challenges divisive attitudes

and helps students from a wide range of different cultures and faiths to mix and work together comfortably. Classes in a community centre attract more isolated or vulnerable students and their families into closer contact with school staff. Special events, such as an expedition to Bangladesh on which young sports leaders will lead sports development in schools, highlight global responsibilities.

Monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle leaders are established and having a positive effect on all areas of provision, though it is taking time for the impact of initiatives to be felt across all areas. Gaps affecting some more vulnerable groups of students are beginning to narrow. The school targets its resources, including extended services, to benefit those at risk of underachievement, although it has not made full use of available information to evaluate the impact of initiatives on different groups of students.

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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	2
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?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2	
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	

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

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection of your school, especially those of you who spoke to members of the inspection team about their work, progress and experiences of school. I am also grateful for the comments parents sent us.

These are the main findings included in our report.

- Boston Spa is a satisfactory and improving school.
- The sixth form is good.
- The headteacher and senior staff have improved the school in important ways, but there is further to go before it is good.
- You reach above average standards in tests and examinations; given your starting points, your progress is satisfactory.
- Lessons are satisfactory and the curriculum you follow is good.
- Your school gives you good care, guidance and support and your personal development is good.

The report asks the school to:

- improve the achievement of students in Key Stages 3 and 4, especially those who start with lower levels of attainment
- help more teaching and learning in the main part of the school to be good, by making sure information about what you can do is used in all classrooms to ensure good challenge for all of you
- make better use of information about your progress to check the impact of initiatives on different groups of students.

You can help your school to improve even further by attending regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

With best wishes for the future.