

The Sir John Colfox School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113852
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325900
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	David Townsend 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	900
Sixth form	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Draper
Headteacher	Kay Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Ridgeway Bridport DT6 3DT
Telephone number	01308 422291
Fax number	01308 420036

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

Sir John Colfox School is an average-sized, mixed comprehensive school in Bridport, Dorset. It serves the town and the surrounding rural area. It has had specialist status in languages since 1999. The school is part of the West Dorset Rural Federation of Schools and Colleges. It has a combined sixth form with Beaminster School. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with specific learning or behavioural needs, is in line with the national average. On entry to the school, students' achievements are in line with those seen nationally.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Sir John Colfox School has improved since the last inspection and now provides a good standard of education. As one of the parents observes, 'it promotes its pupils as individuals'. Achievement and standards are good across each key stage, including in Years 10 and 11 where previously progress rates were satisfactory. Leaders at all levels are now more successfully targeting the needs of each ability group. Middle-ability students, especially boys, who were capable of reaching expected levels but often failing to do so, are now meeting challenging targets because of refinements to teaching and curriculum provision within subjects. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Students' personal development and well-being are also good. They enjoy school and feel an increased sense of belonging. Behaviour is good in lessons and around school. Attendance is satisfactory rather than good and the school is working hard to analyse absence rates and take effective action. Students are well aware of the value of leading a healthy lifestyle. They act safely and know about related risks. Students contribute well to the community within school and the town. Through varied international links and exchange visits, they are developing a wider appreciation of cultural diversity.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall at all key stages. Leaders have worked hard to evaluate and develop teachers' range of strategies and the proportion of teaching that is only satisfactory has declined. However, variation in the quality of teaching still exists. Promising staff development work on the quality of students' learning and thinking has helped some staff promote independent learning successfully but this aspect of the school's work is underdeveloped. The curriculum in the main school is good. There is now a closer match between course provision and students' abilities and interests. Across Years 7 to 11, students have carefully devised study programmes that allow them greater choice and clearer pathways on which to progress in their learning.

The headteacher provides strong leadership. Together with her committed senior team and board of governors, she has sharpened processes for evaluating and improving the school's work. Heads of houses help ensure that the quality of pastoral and academic guidance on offer is of a good quality. Most subject leaders are more skilled in evaluating performance in their departments and moving the teaching forward. For example, the school's specialist languages department has been at the forefront of many of the improvements to teaching, including the greater use made of computer technology in the classroom. The enhanced quality of provision and the impact on this on current achievement across Years 7 to 13 indicate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school's joint sixth form arrangements with Beaminster School are very well managed. Students benefit from having a wider selection of academic courses and the opportunities that come from experiencing another educational environment. The great majority of students continue from Year 12 to Year 13, where they reach above average standards at A-level. Female students score more highly than boys and standards vary between subjects, but overall the progress made by students is very good. This reflects the good teaching and the encouragement given to students to learn independently. Care, welfare and guidance are good. Students are very appreciative of the support given to them by their teachers, and one of the reasons they

enjoy their time in the sixth form so much is the warm atmosphere where 'everyone gets on well'. The fast tracking for some GCSE students has provided good opportunities for sixth formers to work with others. This was seen in a stimulating debate in an AS geography lesson on whether to drill for oil in Alaska, which involved students from both Years 11 and 12. Many group sizes are very small, especially in Year 13, and this restricts the quality of learning, as student interaction is less possible. Students know their examination targets well, and have a good sense of whether they will reach or exceed them.

The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. Leaders have responded to the findings of the previous inspection report to increase the type of courses by planning to introduce Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses in physical education and performing arts in September 2009. However, the school does not offer enough choice on its own site for those students who wish to pursue post-16 vocational courses. This serves to restrict opportunities for them to continue their education in Bridport.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and, in particular, of students' learning and make sure that it is consistent across the school.
- Develop a wider range of courses in the sixth form for students for whom advanced level and related programmes are unsuitable.
- Work closely with parents to improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good, having improved significantly. Students are making good gains in their learning towards the challenging targets set for them. Progress for students in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form has typically been good over time, leading to above average standards by the end of Year 9 and at A-level by the end of Year 13. The 2008 A2 pass rates were above national averages. However, the school has faced a particular challenge in raising achievement in Years 10 and 11. A number of middle-ability students, especially boys, were making slower progress and underachieving, some having demonstrated less positive attitudes to learning. Results in the 2008 examinations reflected this and overall, standards were average and progress was satisfactory. The school has tackled the lower aspirations of the underachieving students assiduously on a number of fronts. It has tailored provision much more closely to students' needs, capabilities and interests and has successfully raised expectations of what students can achieve. Inspection evidence of progress in lessons and the school's information about current achievement shows that students are making good progress this year across the school, including middle ability boys. Given that many students in Year 11 have already secured good passes at GCSE this year, the school is on course to ensure that standards in Key Stage 4 are above average at both the expected levels and the higher A*- A grades in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Students with specific learning needs are making good progress because they have well-designed individual programmes. Students with behavioural needs are helped back on track with their learning through the flexible use of the school's inclusion centre.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are courteous and respectful to each other and their teachers. They speak positively about the school, say they feel very safe in school and know to whom to turn if they need advice or help. Attendance is now satisfactory, due to the measures the school has taken in reducing rates of persistently absent students and improving the attendance of all year groups. The students much enjoy the practical nature of many lessons and the chance to be active learners. They respond well to the school's active encouragement to lead a healthy lifestyle, including making healthy food choices at break and lunchtime. Although behaviour is a concern for some parents, the inspectors found behaviour in lessons and around the school to be good. Students are preparing themselves well for their future economic well-being, through participating in the work experience and active citizenship programmes, which include the 'Youth Leadership Scheme' and the '4ward4Bridport'. They also respond well to the opportunities that the student observers' programme gives them to play a role in helping to improve teaching and learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, enhanced by the increased opportunities for foreign exchanges. Students have a good awareness of multicultural societies through educational visits, pupil exchanges and cultural theme days. Within the sixth form, students appreciate the opportunities the committee structure affords for them to be involved in decision making. Many Year 12 and 13 students are actively involved in valuable community projects and in supporting learning for primary-aged pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Some outstanding lessons were seen. Initiatives employed to reduce the proportion of teaching that is only satisfactory have had a positive impact but variation in the quality of lessons is still apparent. In all lessons, relationships are strong and supportive. In the majority of lessons, there is a constructive dialogue between students and teachers about learning. Expectations are high and teachers bring to students' attention what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. These lessons are well paced and activities engage the interest of learners. Strategies for self- and peer-assessment are used well. In the most successful lessons, teachers used their strong subject expertise to continually challenge students to become independent learners and analytical, reflective thinkers. Some teaching remains less effective. In these sessions, teachers talk for too long, computer whiteboards are under-used as a teaching tool and opportunities are missed to help students extend and assess their own learning. Students in the sixth form are appreciative of the good teaching they receive, particularly the many opportunities they receive to extend their research skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students' motivation to learn and levels of achievement have been raised because the curriculum in the main school is closely tailored to each student's abilities and interests. In Years 7 to 9, students follow flexible learning programmes that are closely tailored to their aptitudes and interests. In Years 10 and 11, there are good pathways to help students develop and pursue their interests. As part of the West Dorset Rural Federation, a highly effective extended vocational curriculum is on offer. Work-related learning and personal, social and health education

are well structured. Personal development days, such as the recent business enterprise and languages project, enrich the curriculum. Many students participate in the extensive programme of extra-curricular activities which ensures that students can develop a range of sporting, artistic and cultural skills. The impact of the school's specialist status in modern foreign languages is evident in outreach work with local primary schools and the dissemination of good practice within the school and across the region. International links work well in promoting cultural awareness and offering opportunities for involvement. The range of language courses on offer throughout the school is wide. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory, rather than good, because there are not enough vocational courses on offer to enable less academic students to stay on at school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a school where every child matters. Students are treated with respect and dignity and their social responsibility is shown in their consideration for others. Students are encouraged to discuss personal problems or concerns. As a result, they feel that the school provides a safe, secure and supportive environment for learning. Safeguarding and health and safety procedures are firmly established. Heads of department and house leaders review students' progress regularly to identify under-achievers, plan intervention strategies and celebrate achievement. Students say they are well informed about their progress and know what to do to meet their personal targets. The school has good arrangements for early intervention and support for vulnerable students and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This support is enhanced through liaison with a wide range of specialist support agencies. The weekly multi-agency meeting is effective in identifying needs and planning personal support plans for individual students. Year 7 students said they valued the way in which they were prepared for their new school and are then supported by Year 10 mediators. In Years 8 and 9, the arrangements for making subject choices are comprehensive. Advice on post-16 education and career choice is equally valued.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school well and her senior leadership team share her commitment to raising standards. Leaders in both the main school and sixth form have used scrutiny of achievement data and student survey feedback well to establish challenging targets and to improve the quality of provision. Monitoring systems are well established and the school's self-evaluation is accurate. There has been considerable focus on improving the quality of teaching. Regular and mostly accurate assessments of classroom practice and the school's emphasis on sharing good practice have helped raise the quality. There is now an emerging focus on students' learning and thinking, emanating from the school's coaching programme and action research projects. However, senior leaders are mindful that strategies to promote greater student engagement in learning have not yet had an impact on all teaching.

Most middle leaders evaluate their subjects accurately and are now more confident in driving through improvements to meet the specific needs of students in each ability group. Governors provide good support and challenge for the school's leaders and play a full role in determining its strategic direction. Together with the school's leaders, they have ensured the school remains outward-looking and that it makes a good contribution to community cohesion.

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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	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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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	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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
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?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**

Dear Students

Inspection of The Sir John Colfox School, Bridport DT6 3DT Thank you very much for the welcome you gave us when we recently visited your school. Your contributions were very valuable in helping us gain further information about a range of aspects of school life. You are justly proud of your school. It provides a good standard of education. We have found the following:

- Standards have risen and most of you are making good progress in your learning over time in a range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. You enjoy your lessons, especially the opportunity to be active learners.
- The curriculum in the main school is well designed to help you find the right pathways to success.
- You are well looked after in school and the school makes sure you develop well as people.
- The school's specialism in languages has helped you develop an appreciation of life as it is for young people in other countries.
- Your headteacher and her team of leaders in the main school and sixth form lead the school well.
- Yours is a good sixth form. Those of you in Years 12 and 13 appreciate the quality of teaching and tutorial support you receive.

We have identified three key aspects in which the school needs to improve further. Although the teaching and learning in the school are good overall, they are not consistent. We have asked the school to make sure that teachers continue to share good practice in helping you become independent learners and thinkers so that with your help, even more lessons are of a higher quality. We have asked the school to work closely with your parents and with you to help raise rates of attendance. Again, you all have a role to play. Within the sixth form, we wish to see a wider range of curriculum course options, especially vocational routes, made available on site.

We wish you the very best in the future.

Yours faithfully

David Townsend

Her Majesty's Inspector