

Churchdown School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115760
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326264
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1349
Sixth form	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Evans
Headteacher	Simon Packer
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2005
School address	Winston Road Churchdown Gloucester GL3 2RB
Telephone number	01452 713340
Fax number	01452 857367

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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

Churchdown is a large non-selective secondary school with a sixth form. The school operates within a selective system where about 11% of pupils in the area go to grammar schools. Students enter from around 23 primary schools. The numbers of students with low attainment on entry has risen significantly since the last inspection. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak languages other than English. Nearly half of the students continue their education in the school's sixth form. Churchdown was designated a specialist visual arts college in September 2005. The school has recently attained the Healthy School Award and Sportsmark and meets the Investors in People and Financial Management Standard in Schools.

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 school. Achievement is good, with many students starting from a low base of academic skills to go on to reach average standards at the end of Year 11. A key strength of the school is its success in providing fully for those with additional needs. Students and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the attitudes and welfare the school promotes. One parent wrote, 'I continue to be delighted with the school; the pastoral care is superb.' Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding in both the main school and the sixth form. All students get on well together and grow tremendously in confidence, courtesy and respect for each other. Students are keen to contribute to the school through their support of the school parliament and good numbers involve themselves in voluntary activities such as fund raising for the community. Attendance has improved well and is now above average. Relationships are excellent and behaviour is good around the school and in the majority of lessons. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The students comment on how safe they feel and reflect on how well they have developed skills in resolving and managing their behaviour. The high quality of care, guidance and support helps the students have pride in their achievements and get the most from their lessons. Specialist visual arts status has been used very effectively to motivate and inspire many students to set high expectations of themselves. This aspect of the school's work contributes well to the good community awareness students demonstrate. A flexible and well-planned curriculum offers a range of pathways to suit students' needs. These provide good continuity into post-16 courses and students develop a good understanding of workplace requirements. The strength and the popularity of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 are such that an increasing proportion of students now progress to further education to follow both academic and vocational courses. Changes in the Key Stage 3 requirements have been well managed. The school has been recognised by the local authority for its determination to develop the Key Stage 3 curriculum to better match the needs of the students entering from the primary phase. Good teaching enables the majority to enjoy their learning and develop independence by Year 11. Thorough, systematic observation of lessons is undertaken. Whilst many lessons are good and or even of outstanding quality, learning is occasionally slowed when teachers do not question well enough to meet the wide range of needs in their classes. Leadership and management are good. Commitment to including all students in the life of the school could not be better. Self-evaluation is good and involves managers at all levels. The tracking of students' progress is regular but expectations set for students are too modest. Managers are improving the range of information they are collecting on students' progress and evaluating with increasing precision. Good direction, with strong support and challenge from governors combined with a good record of improvements, provide a secure basis on which to improve school performance further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students speak with passion about the high quality of teaching and strong pastoral care that both supports and challenges them to achieve and give of their best. Many have chosen to stay on because they feel encouraged and supported by all the opportunities they have. Courses meet needs well, with work placements and increasingly extensive enrichment opportunities broadening students' experiences. The opportunity to share in the benefits of the partnership forged by the arts specialism has further broadened their experiences. Teaching is good, particularly in developing independent learning. Leadership and management are good and

appropriate strategies are well focused on improving personalised subject advice in Year 11. The students are extremely positive about the guidance and support about career options, and increasing proportions of students are choosing to go into higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the new data-tracking system to provide students with realistic yet challenging targets across all subjects.
- Provide more guidance to students on how these targets can be achieved through marking and the use of questions in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards on entry are below average. There is a greater gap than usual between boys' and girls' attainment on entry, which the school succeeds in narrowing over time. Achievement is good through the school and standards have been rising steadily over the last three years, bringing the majority who have no additional needs to average levels by the end of Key Stage 4. Students with learning difficulties make good progress because they respond well to the support they receive. Some individual targets for average ability students are variable in the level of challenge they provide and they do not always make the progress they should. However, the school responded very well to disappointing progress made in mathematics in the 2007 tests in Year 9 and unvalidated results for 2008 show good progress made by the average ability students. Differences in performance across various subjects are beginning to even out as; staffing stabilises, consistent teaching is developed and departmental management is strengthened. There is good achievement in the sixth form. Performance at AS and A level in the fine arts, and in art and textiles, is high.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students clearly enjoy coming to school and the above average attendance levels reflect this. The school has put improving behaviour as a priority for raising standards. This has been effective and standards of behaviour have improved significantly. The students feel very safe because procedures and pastoral care are excellent. Exclusions are very infrequent and have fallen dramatically. Students and their parents are pleased with the speedy response to any incidents of bullying, which are very rare. The students adopt very healthy lifestyles as a result of the health education programme, which includes healthy eating options, and taking part in physical activity both in lessons and after school. The atmosphere in the school is calm, with high expectations of courtesy and appropriate dress. This backdrop contributes strongly to students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students take advantage of the varied opportunities to contribute to activities in the community, as seen through their involvement as fund-raisers and helpers in a local hospice. The school recognises the need to develop more awareness of the global community. The students consider they are listened to, and given every opportunity to use their own initiative to further their personal development. The school parliament and tutor group council provide students with an effective 'pupil voice'. Sixth form students make a very positive contribution to the life of the school. This includes providing in-class support and mentoring for younger pupils. Students develop successfully the skills necessary for their future economic well-being, and take advantage of the wide range of curriculum choices and other opportunities matching their capabilities and interests.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Typically, lessons are characterised by confident and knowledgeable teaching. In a number of outstanding lessons seen, across a range of subjects, the total engagement of the students reflected the wide range of strategies to drive learning forward. The teachers' insights into students' understanding were woven into the excellent questioning used to challenge and deepen understanding. Students enjoy their lessons and because of the mutual respect between teachers and students, learning takes place in a harmonious atmosphere. In a small number of lessons, weak questioning led to a lack of challenge for students who are more able, and a good level of achievement was not obtained. The senior leadership team has rightly focused on improving the marking so that it gives clear suggestions for improvement and leads to greater consistency across the school. A key strategy to improving standards has been the way specific support has been given to small groups of students and the determination of all staff to help them succeed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well tailored to meet the needs of students, and alternative courses with extended work experience and training partners have supported those who may be at risk of falling out of education. There is a good range of options in the school's specialism and effective use is made of professionals and partnerships to enhance students' experiences and raise attainment and engagement. The curriculum is inclusive and additional provision from the school's support department is very effective in maintaining students' commitment and good progress. The extracurricular and enrichment opportunities are a strength, in their range and the students' involvement. This involvement is maintained through into the sixth form. Some of these activities give students valuable leadership experiences. The most able are offered an increasing range of challenging experiences outside the regular curriculum. The recent project-based approach is proving popular at Key Stage 3 and plans are advancing well to increase the level of personalisation, particularly for the more able.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care of students is outstanding. Extensive support for those with learning difficulties and those with challenging behaviour ensures the students receive all the support they need in and out of school, and improve. The shared philosophy of including all students permeates school life. Students' attitudes to learning are monitored regularly and students, parents and tutors agree targets for further improvement. Effective strategies are used to provide suitable academic guidance to learners in order to support them in choosing appropriate courses of study. This includes post-16 provision, where courses are carefully chosen to appeal to students of all abilities. The quality of academic guidance is good, in relation to pathways beyond Year 9 and guidance into sixth form courses, so course needs are met well. The school is improving how it assesses students in order that targets are more challenging for students in Key Stage 3, and is working on a national programme assessing pupil performance. This has already contributed to better progress for some average ability students in English and mathematics. Robust child protection and risk assessment procedures are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management at all levels have enabled the school to make good improvements to the quality of provision and outcomes for students since the last inspection. The headteacher leads with authority, a strong commitment to 'every student matters' and a resolute drive for improvement. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development. They are well informed and provide good support and challenge for the school. Collegiate values are strong. The headteacher has made judicious appointments amongst the team of middle managers and given them full scope to lead, ensuring direct mentoring from senior leaders is in place to help them develop in their roles. Opportunities for staff to develop professionally are very good. Heads of department, year group leaders and the leader of learning work closely together and play a key role in monitoring teaching that is bringing greater consistency across the school. Middle leaders know their subjects well and readily identify the improvements to achievement and standards that have been secured over time. Strategies to promote equal opportunities are rigorously implemented and monitored and all students are placed on appropriate courses or training when they come to leave. However, the school's modest targets set for students limit what some students do achieve. The school has developed its work as a specialist college well under excellent leadership. The close links with local schools and community foster a real sharing of expertise and create the right climate for cross-curricular collaboration as part of the new Year 7 curriculum. Good improvement in science, in narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' achievement, and in attendance shows that the issues from the last inspection have been tackled successfully.

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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?	1	1
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	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
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	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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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**

10 October 2008 Dear Students Inspection of Churchdown School, Gloucester GL3 2RB I am writing on behalf of the five inspectors to let you know what we found out during the recent inspection of your school and sixth form. Thank you very much for the manner in which you helped us. It was a pleasure talking with you and joining you in lessons. Yours is a good school where almost all of you achieve well. The school has moved on well since the last inspection, particularly in encouraging good attendance and much better behaviour in lessons and around the school. We agree with those who talked to us that this is helping you achieve more. Progress in areas such as science and mathematics, where students have not always achieved as well as they might, is getting better. Your artwork is of a high standard and it was a real pleasure to spend time in the exhibition appreciating your talents. Teaching is good and your leaders and managers are working well together, across all departments, to make this even better. Thank your parents and carers on our behalf for contributing to the inspection by returning the questionnaire. We know from them, and from talking with you, that the staff take extremely good care of you and this ensures you feel safe and develop positive attitudes towards learning. The partnership between school, yourselves and your parents is strong and had a good impact on improving behaviour since the last inspection. Whilst we think that academic support is good, particularly in helping you choose appropriate courses and supporting some of you in lessons, we have asked the leaders and managers to be more rigorous in assessing your progress and setting more challenging targets. We know you are consulted about your targets, and hope that you will play your part in continuing to work to your full potential. Jonathan Palk Her Majesty's inspector