

The Cotswold School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115761
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326265
Inspection date	6 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Anthony Shield

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1097
Sixth form	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mavis Dunrossil
Headteacher	Anne Holland
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2006
School address	Bourton-on-the-Water Cheltenham GL54 2BD
Telephone number	01451 820554
Fax number	01451 810658

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, including the sixth form, and investigated the following issues:

- the key elements, particularly in the leadership and management of the school and in teaching, which make it so successful
- whether progress in the sixth form is outstanding
- whether there is evidence that aspects judged excellent by the school are outstanding when compared nationally.

Evidence was gathered from an analysis of nationally published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, scrutiny of policies and other school documentation, observation of the school at work, interviews with teachers, governors and students, and from parents' responses to a questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Cotswold School is in Bourton-on-the-Water and draws its students from a wide area. The school has grown rapidly in recent years and is now slightly larger than most comprehensive schools. Most students are from a White British background, with small numbers from other ethnic heritages. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just below average. The school has both language and science college status. In addition, the school is a Leading Edge School and has received several external awards in recognition of its excellence in promoting healthy schools, environmental sustainability and international work. In December 2007, the school was awarded Full Extended School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Students flourish in this outstanding and 'truly exceptional' school. This quote from a parent is typical of many that were written. It is the close attention to the needs of individual students that marks the school out. Despite an increasing roll, students are valued as individuals and staff are driven by a passionate belief that all can achieve. This culture of mutual respect and trust ensures students, and indeed staff, excel, confident that success will be treasured and mistakes used as stepping stones for further learning. The school, judged outstanding in its last inspection report, remains ambitious. This ongoing pursuit of excellence is led by the headteacher with exceptional vision and wisdom.

Standards have been consistently and significantly above average in recent years at all levels. All measures have been improving since the last inspection. The proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is well above the national average. Given the broadly average attainment of students on entry, this represents outstanding achievement. All value added measures point to outstanding gains made by most students. Challenging targets are regularly exceeded and both boys and girls make exceptionally good progress. In addition, there is a remarkable consistency across all subjects. With nearly one quarter of grades at GCSE being A or A* in 2008, it is clear that more able students fulfil their potential. On the other hand, students with learning difficulties also make outstanding progress and are very well supported. The school has made a particular success of its status as both a specialist language and specialist science college. It has developed strong partnerships with local schools and uses the additional resources wisely to support innovation across the school.

Students make exceptionally good progress because of excellent and often inspiring teaching. Learning is purposeful and taken seriously by students. Fundamental to lessons is the belief that all students will succeed. Expectations of all are high and activities are carefully planned to excite, interest and inspire learning. As a result, students are keen to do well and attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. An excited buzz permeates the learning in most lessons. Students are more usually actively involved, and the emphasis on making students think for themselves and solve problems without asking the teacher has been particularly effective. Students much enjoy this approach and one commented that the 'learning is not just punched into you!' Probing questions are used to deepen understanding. Wide use of information and communication technology (ICT) underpins the teachers' approach to developing independent and resourceful learners. Learning is often collaborative and students confidently share ideas, and listen respectfully to the views of others. Their ability to assess each other's work, and to offer and take criticism from each other, as observed in a drama lesson, are impressive, and show a maturity and sensitivity characteristic of students' outstanding personal development.

The school educates some self-assured and impressively mature young people. They speak with pride of their school. Their confidence in, and appreciation of, their teachers create a distinctive bond. Students take their responsibilities seriously, both as learners and as partners in helping to determine school decision-making. The school council holds specialist remits for teaching and learning, students' welfare, premises and environment and charities and fundraising. These ensure students make a real difference to aspects of school life. As a consequence, students demonstrate a remarkable commitment to, and understanding of, their responsibilities to the school community. Beyond school, students play extensive roles in the local community, and their understanding of their responsibilities as global citizens is very good. In this respect, the school's specialist language status and international work makes a distinctive contribution.

Links with schools in Sweden, France and India, and an extensive range of international trips, ensure students' global awareness is marked. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding. Students are very well prepared for their futures beyond school.

Another key feature central to the school's success is the outstanding curriculum. Flexibility and the ability to respond to individual needs are at the heart of the curriculum and help promote enjoyment and excellent achievement. As one sixth-former remarked, 'there are so many opportunities for anyone to grab!' An increasing emphasis on active learning has been very effective and, in lessons, students can be seen planning, discussing, questioning and assessing. Some imaginative and innovative approaches to learning have sparked students' interest. At Key Stage 4, option choices are driven by the students themselves, who are able to build different pathways to meet their individual needs. An extensive range of well-supported enrichment and extra-curricular activities extend students' interests and develop a deeper understanding of the way the world works. From Arabic to human rights, from 'let's get cooking' to the eco-council, the list of opportunities is impressive.

Students are known well by teachers and this friendliness of spirit characterises relationships within the school community. Outstanding care, guidance and support are central to everything the school stands for. Careful attention to individual students reflects the inclusive nature of its support. Students themselves commented on the people-centred approach of the school. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place. Systems to keep an eye on students' progress are comprehensive and personal targets are known by the students themselves. The use of performance data to set challenging targets effectively raises the bar for both students and their teachers. Just doing enough is not tolerated and students are pushed to strive for their very best.

This culture of high expectations is embedded throughout the school. Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding. The headteacher is very well supported by her senior team and leaders at all levels. Staff are trusted to innovate and take the initiative, and are confident to do so. Open, honest and accurate self-evaluation is the bedrock of the school's drive for even higher standards, with staff continuously seeking ways to refine and develop their practice. Action taken to tackle issues is both robust and effective. Well-informed and committed governors provide supportive but not uncritical insights into the school's work. The school is zealous in its commitment to further improvement, and rightly looks forward with confidence.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of all that the school does. As one typically remarked to inspectors: 'This is a really great school!'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth-formers themselves are powerful ambassadors for the school. They lead by example and speak with maturity about the school and persuasively of the opportunities they have to contribute. They are very appreciative of the high quality of education they receive. Standards are consistently above average and achievement is outstanding. Many students exceed their challenging targets. The curriculum is successfully geared to the wide range of ability and aptitudes. Students are ambitious for success and their confident independent thinking skills equip them very well to make the most of teaching that demands much of their skills of analysis, creativity and argument. They relish opportunities to debate issues in a climate of intellectual curiosity, as in an A-level religious education lesson when students robustly discussed the ethics

of consumerism. Excellent teaching underpins their progress, and they flourish in this atmosphere. The curriculum reflects the wide range of students' interests and abilities and is under constant review. Rigorous monitoring of students' progress ensures they are kept on track. The sixth form is exceptionally well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Inspectors judge that there are no significant areas of weakness in the school or sixth form. Minor areas for improvement are already identified in the school's development plan.

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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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1	
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	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

7 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cotswold School, Bourton-on-the-Water GL54 2BD

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. Your friendly welcome was much appreciated and we were impressed by the mature and thoughtful way you answered our questions. This was a tribute to your excellent personal development. You rightly take considerable pride in being a student at The Cotswold School and enjoy being at the school. Your school is outstanding in all respects.

- Here are some of the main findings from our report:
- The school provides an exciting climate in which to learn. This encourages you to do your best and achieve exceptionally well.
- Teachers know you well as individuals and take especial care to ensure you are well looked after, both in terms of your personal and academic needs.
- Teaching encourages you to participate actively and makes learning interesting. This ensures that most of you make outstanding progress.
- Sixth formers are very good role models for the younger students and are given exceptional opportunities to excel.
- Confident personal and social skills help to prepare you for your future beyond school.
- The curriculum is excellent and there is a great range of clubs and enrichment activities.
- The headteacher, her senior team and all other managers carry out their responsibilities exceptionally well.

Thank you once again for your help during our visit, and best wishes and good luck with your work in the future!

Yours faithfully

Tony Shield

Lead inspector