

Pittville School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115772
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326268
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	644
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Sharpe
Headteacher	Gaynor Cheshire
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Albert Road Cheltenham GL52 3JD
Telephone number	01242 524787
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pittville is a smaller than average secondary school which has specialist status for performing arts. It serves students who predominantly come from disadvantaged areas within Cheltenham. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students that are learning English as an additional language is below average but increasing. The school has had a significant number of changes of headteacher over the last few years and the present headteacher has been in post since September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pittville has improved significantly since the previous inspection and now provides a good standard of education. There have been improvements to the overall standards, the leadership and management, the quality of teaching and learning, and the behaviour of students over the last eighteen months. These demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further. The very strong leadership of the headteacher has meant that staff are held to account for their work and standards are rising. Many of the innovations are still in their early days and, as such, they have not yet had full impact.

Standards remain below average, but the school made significant progress in raising the proportion of students who gained five or more GCSE passes at grade A* to C including mathematics and English, from 24% to 38%. Although this was satisfactory progress for this cohort of students, recent school analysis and parent responses to a school questionnaire show that students generally make good progress and this is starting to make up lost ground for previous weak achievement. The very strong emphasis on improving the proportions of grade C and above results in GCSE examinations has meant that not all higher attaining students reached the expected levels and some lower attaining students underachieved. Achievement in mathematics has risen in response to targeted support for teaching and ensuring better lessons. However, standards in science remain well below average.

Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many lessons are good with some very engaging teaching and challenging work. However, the school is aware of some teaching that falls short of the good standards expected. The management is working effectively in improving the overall quality and has ensured that staff are supported when needs have been identified. The very great improvement to the standards of behaviour within the school means that students behave well in lessons and are very receptive when lessons engage and excite their interests. In a small minority of lessons, students do not always know what they are expected to learn, the work is not well matched to their abilities or suitably challenging, and assessments are not used effectively to identify and inform students what they need to do next.

The school makes very good use of its specialist performing arts status. Students have been motivated to attend school by being involved in productions. The specialism also impacts positively upon the good curriculum and offering good support to local primary schools and also local community groups. Students show positive attitudes to work and make very positive contributions to the life of the school. The introduction of banding arrangements and the change in the role of pastoral leaders to one centred on academic guidance have contributed to students making better progress. The identification of students who are underachieving has improved this year so that it is not just targeted around those who are not secure at gaining a GCSE grade C and is starting to identify students who are working below their expected level.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build upon the work done to increase the proportion of students gaining good grades in GCSE examinations to ensure that high attaining students achieve appropriate numbers of A and A* grades and lower attaining students achieve at least in line with expectation.
- Raise standards in science by ensuring students are fully engaged and challenged in lessons.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching by ensuring a greater proportion of good or better lessons that clearly identify what is to be learned, match the work well to students, and use assessments effectively to show students what they need to do next.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with below average standards. Over the last few years they have then tended to make satisfactory progress to reach standards which are below the national average when they leave. In 2007 fewer than 30% of students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including mathematics and English. The strong focus on ensuring more students reached this benchmark meant that in 2008 results improved significantly so that 38% of students reached this level. A consequence of this very targeted intervention was that higher attaining students and lower attainers did not make as much progress as expected. Results from the school's records show that it is on track to exceed a challenging target for the proportion of students reaching this benchmark in 2009 and be close to, or exceed, the present national average. The school exceeded its specialist school targets for music and drama GCSEs in 2008 but missed the one for GCSE art.

As a result of close analysis of data and the leadership of the school holding subject leaders and staff more to account for their results, students make good progress overall and standards are rising. However, standards and progress in Key Stage 3 are not as consistently good as in Key Stage 4, because the school has been concentrating mainly on the older years. The school has identified areas which are underperforming and is working closely with specific departments to ensure they improve.

Students with learning difficulties generally make similar progress to their peers. However, a significant number of students who have learning difficulties are also persistent absentees and they make less progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school uses its specialist status very well to support students' good personal development and well-being. Good moral and social development mean that students have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong, know and support the school's values, and build positive relationships with each other and their teachers.. Cultural development is a major strength of the school and is excellent. Although attendance remains below the national average, measures to improve this are impacting on outcomes and persistent absenteeism is slowly reducing. Punctuality to school and lessons is now good. Improving students' behaviour has been a key focus and is now good. The new rewards policy is encouraging students to develop good attitudes to learning. Students report that they feel safe in school with few incidents of bullying which are dealt with well. A few parents commented upon bullying in the responses to questionnaires. Students are appreciative of the school's efforts to introduce healthier food at breakfast, break and lunch. They speak very highly of the school cafe and take up rates are very high. The school is rightly seen as an example of good practice regarding healthy eating by the local authority. Students are aware of the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol.

There are many opportunities for students to contribute to the life of the school and the wider community through involvement in the many performing arts events. They also play a very valuable contribution to community cohesion, by becoming involved in local activities like organising traffic calming outside the school and developing a DVD on knife crime with the local police. The school council and the prefect system make valuable contributions to the life of the school, whilst students' views are an integral part of departmental reviews. Students

respond enthusiastically to the range of work related programmes on offer and many also take advantage of opportunities to develop leadership skills by, for example, becoming arts prefects or junior sports leaders and supporting local schools. Focus days are used effectively to provide opportunities for students to learn in a range of different ways, develop teamwork, and improve their presentation skills. These skills, together with their average literacy and numeracy capability ensure that pupils' preparation for the future is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The strong school focus on improving the quality of teaching has started to impact upon the overall quality. Good use has been made of in-service sessions and of advanced skills teachers to improve the quality of lessons and assessment for learning. The teaching and learning group has led training for staff on structured lessons and has developed resources that give ideas for teaching.

In the majority of lessons when teaching is good or better, students are challenged and engaged. These lessons build upon students' prior learning and also ensure activities vary according to the ability of individuals. In the school's specialist areas and humanities, students are given the opportunity to comment on each other's work through effective peer and self assessments. Students say they like the system of marking involving two stars and a wish which works well in the best areas such as drama, but is not consistent across all subject areas.

The school recognises, and inspection confirms, that there is still too much satisfactory teaching which fails to challenge and engage students. Work in these lessons is not consistently well matched to the abilities within the class, some activities are mundane with too much teacher talk and insufficient student activity. Assessment is weaker and does not inform students what they need to do to improve or what the next steps are with the work. The pace of learning in these lessons is slower and students make only satisfactory progress. However, even in the most mundane of lessons, behaviour remains good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides good breadth and balance and meets the needs of most students well. The support to improve literacy skills is good. Recent changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, including introducing banding arrangements, are positive developments.

At Key Stage 4, guided pathways for students with different profiles have helped tailor the curriculum to meet their needs more effectively. All students study a performing arts subject that is well supported by both students and parents. There is a wide range of vocational courses to match interests and rising aspirations and very good links with local colleges, which contribute positively to learning opportunities. As part of a local consortium, the school will offer three diplomas from next year, including being the base for the media and arts diploma. A small number of students who have difficulty coping with the conventional curriculum follow an alternative programme which helps build their self-confidence. The school recognises the need to develop these courses further so that students are able to access a broader curriculum, including arts and/or vocational options and accreditation.

Students are encouraged to attend a full range of extra-curricular activities that cater for a wide range of interests, and take up is good. Many students are involved in dance, drama and music and take part in a wide range of performing arts events both on and off site. This is having a continuing positive effect on raising aspirations and improving the self-esteem, communication and self-confidence of students. Students also represent the school in a wide range of teams and sporting activities and trips.

Provision for gifted and talented students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory and improving. Particularly good provision was observed in the Years 7 and 8 foundation groups for low attainers that are highly effective in improving students' communication and other transferable skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The change of roles within the pastoral support to provide an effective focus on academic progress and personal development has ensured that students are well supported. There is now close monitoring of each student's progress towards their challenging targets, with information available to inform early intervention. Reports of children's progress are given six times each year to parents. Students value the advice and feedback they receive at their regular individual meetings with form tutors.

The school has developed robust systems for tackling absence. Guidance to students at each stage of their education is sound. Induction works smoothly, students settle in well from their primary schools and receive good advice for their choice of courses and career development. Students from families without experience of higher education are encouraged towards it if they have the potential to achieve university entry and some students said this made them want to go on and achieve well so that they could take up the opportunity.

Students work safely and responsibly in lessons and with risks carefully assessed and minimised. Appropriate checks are in place for adults working with students and safeguarding complies with current government requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management have made a significant impact upon the school. The highly effective headteacher has ensured that her vision and commitment to improve the provision and raise the standards reached by students has become the expectation of all; staff, students and parents.

Staff are now held to account for the work and standards with classes and this has meant that the quality of teaching and learning has improved and there is a realistic understanding of what needs to be improved further. Subject leadership has improved and heads of department are now better able to lead developments within their areas. They are very well supported and challenged by members of the good senior leadership team. The system of departmental reviews includes views from students and parents who are encouraged to be part of the evaluation of the school. The change of emphasis from pastoral leadership to academic support has also meant that middle managers are better able to monitor the work of the students and inform

when and where to intervene. Governance is good and supports and challenges the school as appropriate.

The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It has gained the views from two local residents' groups and is actively engaged in planning facilities within a local park and what needs to be incorporated within the area. Governors ensure all equalities procedures are in place and have just updated all appropriate policies. Plans are in place to inform parents once the full governing body has ratified these policies.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
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
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**

18 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Pittville School, Cheltenham GL32 5JD

We visited your school recently, met some of you at lunchtime, and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very pleased with your friendliness and helpfulness and we were particularly impressed by your good behaviour. It was evident how proud you were to be in a performing arts specialist school. You clearly enjoy supporting other schools, the local community, and taking part in a variety of productions both as performers and supporting behind the scenes. We judge that your school has improved a lot recently and now provides a good standard of education. Although many of the innovations are still in their early days, we consider these improvements show the school can develop even further.

Staff support and guide well, enabling you generally to make good progress. You currently make better progress in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Standards are improving. Many more of your fellow students last year gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including mathematics and English, although some students did not do as well as they could. Results are also low in science and we have asked your school to raise standards by ensuring you are fully engaged and challenged in lessons. Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many lessons are good and many of you told us you preferred it when lessons were lively and interesting and you had more opportunities to work in groups or independently. The school has introduced good procedures to track how well you are doing. However in some lessons there is not enough challenge, work is not always set at the correct level for you, and you are not always told how to improve. This is an area we have asked the school to address, along with ensuring it builds upon the work of last year by making sure all of you get better results.

Some of you miss a lot of school and this affects your progress. Although attendance remains below the national average the school has developed strong systems to tackle persistence absence. You can help by making sure some of you attend more frequently.

.You have a very good understanding of what you need to do to become healthy; the school is rightly seen as an example of good practice by the local authority. The curriculum is good and meets your needs well. You take part in a large variety of extra-curricular activities, especially the performing arts.

Your school is well led and managed and it gains the views of yourselves and your parents to see how it can improve further. Many of you said that you feel your new headteacher has made a big impact, and we agree with you. We wish you well in this supportive school. We hope that things continue to improve and you achieve well. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely Michael Smith HMI