

Pershore High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116943
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326499
Inspection dates	22–23 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1242
Sixth form	244
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Clive Corbett
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
School address	Station Road Pershore WR10 2BX
Telephone number	01386 552471
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large school where the vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have free school meals is low. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has been a Technology College since 2002 and a Training School since April 2007. The Hampton Centre, a learning resource centre and mainstream autism base, opened in 2007. It provides specialist resources for a maximum of 14 students with moderate learning difficulties and 8 students on the autistic spectrum. It also makes provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the mainstream school.

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 which provides a good education for its students. Some features of its work are outstanding. It provides an excellent education in the sixth form. Parents rightly value all aspects of the school's work, particularly the wide range of opportunities the school provides for their children and the high levels of commitment of the staff. One parent accurately wrote, 'The school respects and values its students, both as individuals and as members of the school and wider community. It fosters the development of well-rounded individuals: confident, physically fit, intellectually engaged and socially responsible.'

Much of the credit for students' good achievement and personal development is due to strong leadership provided by the headteacher, which parents variously describe as 'inspirational', 'passionate' and 'walking the talk'. He is supported well by an effective leadership team and staff. Governors provide a good level of support and challenge. Self-evaluation is good, leading to effective short-term planning. This has resulted in improved achievement in the sixth form and Key Stage 3 and, more recently, to improvements in Key Stage 4, although the school is aware that there is further improvement required. Pastoral staff and subject leaders promote the use of targets to improve students' achievement unevenly.

Longer-term planning is ambitious, but realistic. Individual targets have been raised, especially in Year 11, encouraging higher expectations on the part of staff and students. Specialist status has promoted a rise in standards in design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) and science within the school. Funding has been targeted effectively to areas of greatest need. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection and is well placed to improve further. Capacity to improve further in the sixth form is excellent.

The students' personal development is good, with some outstanding features. It is promoted well by the good level of pastoral care the school provides. Students enjoy school and make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. They take their numerous responsibilities, such as being training school delegates, very seriously, promoting the school's reputation very well within the local community. They have an excellent awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle, which is demonstrated in their healthy eating habits and enjoyment of excellent school meals. They have high levels of participation in an excellent range of extra-curricular sports provided by the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, particularly in relation to the empathy students develop with those in linked schools in other countries. However, within this mainly mono-cultural school, students' understanding of the range of faiths and cultures within modern Britain is limited. Behaviour is generally good, although there is occasionally some boisterous behaviour in the playground, and a few lapses in students' attention to safe practices.

Students feel safe and have positive attitudes to learning. Above average attendance contributes to their good achievement. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and most students make good progress from their average starting points on entry to the school. Their achievement is enhanced further by good and improving teaching and an interesting, increasingly flexible curriculum.

Progress is slower in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3, especially in English and mathematics. A small minority of lessons in Years 10 and 11 are too teacher focused, with insufficient opportunities for students to contribute. This occasionally leads to inattentive behaviour and slows the pace of learning. Students occasionally need better guidance in examination technique,

such as how to deal with complex problems or manage course work. The school is tackling these issues effectively by improving teaching and the curriculum, using a wide range of well targeted strategies, but recognises that further improvements are required.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Throughout the school, marking is regular and positive in tone, but too frequently does not provide sufficient guidance to students on the next steps to take. Students are set short-term targets, but sometimes do not understand them or use them to help improve their work.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. The recently opened Hampton Centre makes good provision for students' social and emotional needs and is effective in helping to integrate students into mainstream classes. It is increasingly effective in supporting their learning. Many students and staff have only recently arrived in school. Targets for these students are challenging and appropriate, but it is too soon for progress towards them to be apparent. Good arrangements are in place to improve the skills of some older students in English and mathematics at a local college. However, as the school is aware that this sometimes disrupts their school-based studies, improved arrangements are to be put in place for September 2009.

Students' good social skills, personal development and academic achievement prepare them well for the next stage of their lives and careers.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students' achievement is excellent and standards are well above average from their broadly average standards on entry to the sixth form. Recruitment and retention rates are high. Standards at AS and A level, and in vocational courses, are well above average, and have improved over the last year. Students' personal development and attitudes to work are excellent and their enjoyment, personal ambition and determination play a significant part in their progress. They make an important contribution to the school, helping younger pupils and taking active roles supporting staff during lunchtimes. They are active in community work and, for example, have raised funds to pay for a group of Zambian students to visit the school, as part of the effort to raise awareness of people in other parts of the world. The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional. Students appreciate the high quality academic support and guidance they receive. The process of setting targets and the clear review process are excellent, and make a significant contribution to students' achievement. The school responds to students' personal, career and higher education needs extremely effectively.

Teaching is good with some excellent features. Work is very challenging and lessons are focused clearly on examination requirements. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use ICT effectively. In the best lessons, teachers encourage students to research and to develop their own opinions. However, this is not always the case and the opportunities to work independently are limited. The school is already working on this and it is beginning to improve. The excellent curriculum is a key factor in students' academic success. A wide range of GCE A and AS levels are offered. The range of vocational courses is limited, but there is good provision in the local area. The school seeks students' views on subjects they wish to study and attempts to provide them. The range of 'elective' choices is exceptionally wide, many are accredited and students welcome the school's efforts to meet their demands. Leadership and management are excellent with a clear focus on improving provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement, particularly in Key Stage 4, and especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that: -all lessons provide students with good opportunities for active participation and engagement -strategies to maximise examination potential, such as guiding students on the best way to answer examination questions, are used effectively -students understand their short-term targets and use them to establish the next steps they need to take -marking provides clear guidance to students on how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Students make good progress from their broadly average standards on entry, reaching above average standards by the end of Year 11. They make faster progress in Years 8 and 9 than in Years 10 and 11, particularly in English and mathematics. However, improvements in the quality of teaching and the curriculum are beginning to increase the pace of learning for older students. For example, the introduction of a modular course for some students in mathematics has broken the examination into smaller 'chunks' which are easier to manage. An increased emphasis on areas students find difficult, for example, the analysis of non-fiction text, is beginning to raise standards in English. However, the school is aware that there is further to go in both subjects. Standards have risen sharply and students achieve well in design and technology, especially in food, textiles and electronics, because of the impact of specialist status. Progress is good in German, ICT and physical education (PE). Standards in science have risen and achievement is now good. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, because many have been in the school only a short time.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Students have a clear sense of right and wrong. They are well aware of cultures across the world, through close links with schools abroad. However, their understanding of the diverse character of communities in the United Kingdom is less secure. Students feel safe because bullying is rare, and is dealt with swiftly and effectively when it occurs. Behaviour is generally good. All aspects of how to live a healthy lifestyle are outstanding, including awareness of the effects of drugs. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. They show initiative, become leaders and help others. Examples include the elected school council, student committees, the teaching and learning committees and the help given to younger students by those in the sixth form. Students are well prepared for the workplace through carefully planned work-related learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons increasingly present students with a good level of challenge to which they respond well. Learning objectives are made explicit, so students are aware of what they have to achieve. In many lessons, students have frequent opportunities for discussion and they respond with maturity to skilful questioning. Relationships are very good, with much use of praise and humour.

Teachers are becoming more skilled in deploying teaching assistants to support lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The use of ICT, funded through the school's specialist status, has improved students' engagement in some lessons in English and mathematics. However, the use of short-term targets to help students move forward in their learning, whilst improving rapidly, is too inconsistent across the school. In a small minority of lessons, older students receive too little help in mastering examination techniques, such as how to manage course work. Very occasionally, especially in Key Stage 4, teaching fails to engage students' interest, because there are too few opportunities for their active participation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Detailed planning with middle schools helps students to build effectively on previous learning and is a key factor in their rapid progress. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced, and meets the needs of students well. At Key Stage 4, specialist status has enabled the school to provide a good range of choices in design and technology, ICT and science, and to enhance staffing in key areas like English and mathematics. The curriculum choice is, however, more restricted for students who do not find these subjects engaging. The school is working hard to find ways to extend choices, such as early entry to examinations in some subjects in Year 10. The curriculum is becoming more flexible, in order to support those who fall behind, especially older students in English and mathematics. Parents and students, rightly, speak highly of the interesting curriculum, enriched by a 'fantastic' range of clubs. At Key Stage 4, students benefit from a good variety of careers education at local colleges and work-experience opportunities that equip them well for the future.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

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Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, supported well by the senior team and staff, provides an ambitious vision and clear sense of direction for the school. Plans to improve students' achievement are good, and are based on a thorough and accurate analysis of the school's work. Improved provision and effective targeting of resources have resulted in better progress for students. This is now beginning to have an impact on Key Stage 4. Funding and expertise gained through specialist

status have been used effectively in promoting ICT in the local community, including primary schools. The monitoring of students' progress and the process of setting targets have improved, but are not consistently promoted across the school. Governors provide good support and challenge for the school. Their individual expertise is used well, for example in providing support for the school's excellent catering service. However, arrangements for the induction of new governors are at an early stages. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. Whilst some aspects are good or better, pupils' knowledge and understanding of other faiths and cultures in Britain today is promoted unevenly.

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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	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?	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	1
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	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**

24th October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Pershore High School, Pershore, WR10 2BX.

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we visited your school. A number of your parents replied to our questionnaire, so please share the content of this letter with them. Your parents value the strong leadership of the headteacher and the effective support of school staff, so they will be pleased to know that the school provides you with a good education overall. Some aspects are outstanding.

Education in the sixth form is excellent and it is very well led. Students in the sixth form make excellent progress, reaching well above average standards from broadly average starting points, because their attitudes to learning are excellent, the curriculum is very closely matched to their needs, academic guidance is excellent and teaching is good, with some outstanding features.

In Years 8 to 11, you make good progress overall, reaching above average standards. You make faster progress in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4, especially in English and mathematics. However, progress in Years 10 and 11 is improving because teaching and the curriculum are getting better. Achievement in design and technology is particularly good, supported by specialist school status. Your personal development is good and your adoption of healthy lifestyles and contribution to the school and local community are excellent.

In order to make sure things continue to improve, we have asked the school to:

- Improve achievement, particularly in Key Stage 4, and especially in English and mathematics by ensuring that:

-lessons provide you with good opportunities for active participation -you are clear about the best ways to tackle examinations -you understand your short-term targets and use them to establish the next steps you need to take -marking provides you with clear guidance on how to improve your work.

Best wishes,

Marion Thompson Lead Inspector