

Quarrydale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122840
Local Authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	327807
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2009
Reporting inspector	David Simpson 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)	924
Sixth form	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J A Heald
Headteacher	Mr J C Weaver
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
School address	Stoneyford Road Sutton-in-Ashfield Nottinghamshire NG17 2DU
Telephone number	01623 554178
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Quarrydale is an average size secondary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, the highest proportion of which are those with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. Quarrydale attained specialist science status in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Quarrydale is a good school which has improved significantly since the last inspection. In recent years the school has focused strongly on developing the skills which enable pupils to make good progress. The consequence has been that results have improved and attainment is now in line with national averages in Key Stages 3 and 4. This represents good achievement based upon challenging targets and high expectations in lessons. As a result of the school's hard work, pupils are purposeful, keen to learn and able to demonstrate creative and independent thinking. They are welcoming, assured and thoughtful. Their personal development is good.

The quality of teaching is good overall. Lessons are planned thoughtfully to provide a range of learning activities and, in the best lessons, to inject increasing challenge. Teachers have good subject knowledge and evidently enjoy being in the classroom and working with the young people of Quarrydale. As the school is becoming more successful in enabling more pupils to attain higher standards it now faces the need to provide more challenging work in lessons for the most able. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. In recent years significant developments at Key Stage 3 include an integrated humanities course in Year 7 which provides increased stability for pupils during their transition from primary education, a 'learning to learn' course which helps them to reflect on how well they are acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills across the curriculum, and the development of a citizenship and personal development course which is taught by specialists. At Key Stage 4 the school is increasingly ambitious in diversifying the courses pupils can pursue to accreditation, including vocationally based qualifications in subjects such as physical education and a diploma in land and environment studies which effectively draws upon the school's market garden area and local expertise. The school's care, guidance and support are very successful in helping pupils to make the right course choices to meet their needs and aptitudes. 'Every Quarrydale child matters' is at the centre of the work of staff and the school has invested wisely to secure high quality support for pupils who are experiencing difficulties with their learning so that they make good progress during their school career. The quality of provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. The pupils make satisfactory progress and attain standards in line with their prior attainment but well below national averages for advanced level qualifications. The school does not meet the statutory requirement for religious education to be taught in the sixth form. The school is aware that improvements to quality of the sixth form education are a priority.

Specialist status has made a significant contribution to school improvement during its first year. The school has taken good advantage of the leadership expertise in science. The head of science is playing a significant role in strengthening the quality of provision in English. The science department provides coaching in aspects of teaching, such as helping pupils to understand the requirements of examination criteria which is having an impact throughout the school. The significant investment in information and communication technology (ICT) has had a positive impact on teaching strategies and the pupils' attitudes to learning. The school has an ambitious community plan but has experienced some delays in its implementation, for example establishing links with local construction and metal fabrication industries. The school has a secure awareness of its context and is undertaking a range of activities to promote social cohesion, however, links with the community are currently being developed and at present the impact of the school's work is not fully evaluated.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is well regarded and has provided outstanding leadership. He has accomplished important developments which are secured and

well accepted because he has planned carefully to introduce improvements incrementally and strategically. He has established a shared ethos of high expectations. Since the last inspection standards and attendance have improved, the curriculum better meets the needs of pupils, exclusions have significantly reduced: this is an impressive track record which demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve and its ongoing ambition to get ever better.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

In recent years the number of pupils staying at Quarrydale to pursue their education post-16 has been very low. However, as attainment in the main school is improving, the sixth form is growing significantly but the effective procedures to ensure good progress by pupils which are functioning so well in the main school have not yet been implemented with the same rigour in the sixth form. Pupils achieve satisfactorily overall in the sixth form. Standards in advanced level qualifications are well below national averages, although these results represent satisfactory progress given the pupils' prior attainment at GCSE. Teachers have good subject knowledge but tend to provide too few opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their learning, help one another to acquire knowledge and understanding, or produce presentations to demonstrate what they have accomplished. The curriculum has improved in recent years as a result of closer cooperation with other providers in the area. Some pupils benefit from pursuing vocational courses at a local college, for example in child care and brick laying, whilst improving their qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT at Quarrydale. In addition, pupils can pursue courses such as health and social care to advanced level at the school. However, the school is aware that it needs to provide a greater range of alternatives for pupils who want to continue their education but may not yet be ready to study a full 'package' of advanced level courses at 16. Sixth formers are conscientious and hard working. Many help out in the main school by supporting lessons but this is largely unstructured and form time misses opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The tracking of pupils' progress is embryonic and consequently guidance and support for pupils at risk of underperforming is not sufficiently swift. The rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring currently lacks the efficacy which has driven forward standards in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

Improve:

- the quality of education in the sixth form including meeting statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education
- the challenge in lessons for the most able
- the evaluation and enhancement of community cohesion.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Unvalidated results for 2008 at Key Stage 3 show that standards improved from 2007. Mathematics improved at all levels and particularly at Level 6, where a 22 per cent improvement moved standards from being below to above average. In science, standards were above national averages. In English, results also improved significantly to being broadly in line with national averages at Level 5 but remained below average at Level 6. Current performance, based on lesson observations and secure school evidence, indicate further improvements in each subject. Standards of boys and girls are similar. Standards at GCSE have been improving for several

years. In 2008 there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of pupils gaining five A* to C passes at GCSE, meeting the national average for the first time. Targets were exceeded. However, five A* to C passes including English and mathematics fell slightly and remained below the national average. Inspection evidence indicates further improvements in 2009, such that a higher proportion of pupils are well on the way to attaining five or more A* to C passes including English and mathematics. The number of pupils performing at the higher grades A*/A is improving but remains well below average. The school's performance in the unvalidated 2008 Key Stage 3 tests shows that pupils achieved well in Years 7 to 9 compared with their broadly average attainment on entry to the school. Achievement across the school was satisfactory in 2008, however, inspection evidence indicates sustained improvement so that pupils' achievement is now good at both key stages. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of effective support and relevant curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils from all years talk confidently about their enjoyment of school, state that they feel safe and speak positively about relationships within the school community. Parents appreciate steps taken by the school to improve pupils' attitudes, behaviour and pride in their school uniform. The school has prioritised attendance and recent initiatives, which include peer support groups and individual target-setting, have had an impressive effect on attendance in all years, enabling the school to exceed national averages. Behaviour around school and in lessons is good and pupils are polite, helpful, and courteous. The school has worked hard to bring about a significant change in ethos which has allowed a better climate for learning to be established. Exclusions have been used to reinforce high expectations of behaviour but as the school's expectations have become widely accepted, exclusions and incidents dealt with by senior leaders have decreased significantly. The school has placed important emphasis on the safety of the individual, enabling it to deal effectively with the few incidents of bullying, and pupils are actively involved in supporting each other. Younger pupils particularly value the mentoring and literacy support which is provided by some of the older pupils. Pupils are pleased with the improvements to school meals organisation and generally make healthy choices. They learn about the need to make informed personal choices in relation to healthy lifestyles and they engage in plenty of physical exercise through a variety of timetabled activities and lunch and after-school clubs. The curriculum, planned activities and community links contribute well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. There are good opportunities to raise awareness of the wider community through fund raising, trips and residential visits. Pupils value the opportunity to bring about changes in the school through the activities of the school council and pupils feel that their views are listened to; for example, Year 11 pupils have reflected thoughtfully on their experiences in English and mathematics as part of the school's self-evaluation procedures. Pupils have opportunities to apply for a variety of leadership roles, for example, prefects, sports leaders and community leaders. The prefects and head boy and girl have a high profile in the school and are able both to exercise and further develop their leadership expertise. Pupils make satisfactory progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, which contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well in lessons and, in the main school, make good progress as a result of the quality of the teaching they receive. They enjoy their lessons and maintain good relationships with their teachers. Pupils are also well supported by teaching assistants. In the best lessons teachers use a variety of strategies and encourage pupils to be independent. Occasionally, particularly in the sixth form, teachers are too dominant and pupils too passive. Lessons are well planned and teachers are aware of the needs of individual pupils and usually plan to meet those needs. However, in practice the most able are not always fully challenged. Teachers have good subject knowledge and share learning objectives with pupils; additionally, they use a range of questioning techniques to check learning, but do not always use questions to probe individual understanding sufficiently. Pupil progress is assessed regularly. However, whereas all pupils are aware of their targets, they do not always know how to reach the next level and some who have reached their targets are not challenged to go further. There are some examples of very good marking across the school. In English and science pupils are given clear guidance on the standards they are at and how to improve. However, this good practice is not adopted consistently across the whole school to ensure that all pupils are fully aware of their next steps and how to take them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The great majority of pupils enjoy their education and achieve well because the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum suitable for the needs of its pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The curriculum is inclusive at Key Stage 3 and all pupils are engaged in the 'Learning to Learn' programme. In Year 7 all pupils are taught on an integrated humanities course which increases the pupils' regular contact with a member of staff and helps with their transition from primary school. At Key Stage 4 all pupils follow one of three distinct but flexible pathways, which promote their achievement and personal development. Alongside a full range of GCSE courses pupils can also take more vocationally-based courses; for example the introduction of BTEC science has had a positive effect on pupil success. Through the specialist status, triple award science and statistics have also been introduced and ICT provision is now much stronger. Lower attaining pupils gain ASDAN qualifications and follow vocational courses either on or off site. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. Although there has been an increase in advance level vocational courses, resulting in better progression routes for pupils, there is still a lack of suitable courses for those pupils likely to find advanced level study at 16 too challenging. Through specialist status, there are strong links with local primary schools. There is a wide range of enrichment activities available, including drama, art and sport, and the fighting fit club. These activities are popular with pupils, but the school has no precise figures on actual take-up.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is welcoming and friendly. There are well-established arrangements for providing pastoral care and pupils and parents speak highly of the help offered by the school; as one Year 7 parent commented 'Quarrydale school and the staff have bent over backwards to make

my son welcome.' Parents appreciate the robust strategies that help pupils to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school. Whilst tutorial time offers opportunities to reflect on and extend areas of learning the school knows that this could be used more effectively. Vulnerable pupils receive good support from committed teachers. Teaching assistants understand the diverse range of needs and offer highly effective support in class and in the learning support area. Pupils are given guidance which enables them to make informed decisions about their futures. Systems to ensure safe recruitment of staff are in place. Good procedures ensure pupils' health, welfare and safety both in school and the workplace. Arrangements for safeguarding of pupils are robust and reviewed regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The vision and leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He enjoys the confidence of the whole school community, with staff, parents and pupils speaking highly of his ability to lead and their pride in the improvements he has implemented. The headteacher has established a clear direction for the school, underpinned by a commitment to improving achievement. The senior team are working effectively in planning and implementing improvements although there is some way to go in the sixth form. They are ably supported by middle leaders, some of whom benefit from additional coaching and guidance. The use of assessment to set targets and track pupil progress against them has had a major impact on improving standards. However, there are some inconsistencies in the use of assessment to match work to the abilities of higher-attaining pupils and to improve their level of challenge. The school makes every effort to ensure that discrimination is eliminated and that the needs of all pupils are met. Strategic planning, which is linked to financial management, is highly focused on improving standards and is reviewed regularly. Day-to-day financial planning and monitoring are excellent and the school provides good value for money. Self-evaluation is rigorous, detailed and candid in the main school, although the school judges the quality of provision in the sixth form too generously. Governance is good. The governing body is well informed and is well placed to drive development and challenge performance.

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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	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	3
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	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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	3
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	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	3
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**

18 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Quarrydale School, Sutton-in-Ashfield, NG17 2DU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. Your school is a good school and we could tell that it has improved a lot since it was last inspected. We could also tell that you are proud of what you are achieving at Quarrydale. Your very positive views and those of your parents have added to our sense that there is much to celebrate about your education.

Many of your lessons contain lively and interesting activities and you obviously enjoy opportunities to work independently and develop your own ideas. The school has some courses which are special to you, such as Year 7 humanities and learning to learn. As you progress on through the school you are guided well to make choices in your education so that you will have a worthwhile and enjoyable time from Year 10 onwards. Your school offers you a very good range of courses and having become a specialist science school the opportunities open to you are even more varied and you get the opportunity to use information and communication technology far more often. There are many good opportunities for you to show leadership, for example as prefects or in sport, and to help others through peer counselling or buddy reading. On top of this you have a varied range of lunchtime and out of school activities to choose from - I very much enjoyed looking at the photographs of your production of 'Bugsy Malone.'

You are making good progress in your learning but we have suggested a few things the school could do to get even better. The first is to make your sixth form as good as the rest of the school. Secondly, we think that some of your lessons could have more challenge for those of you who are meeting your targets and need to be stretched further so that you can attain even higher grades. Finally, we've asked the school to think about how it can extend opportunities for you to build strong and positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds so that you can make a strong contribution to the elimination of prejudice and discrimination.

Thank you again for making us so welcome and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully,

David Simpson

Her Majesty's Inspector