

Bartholomew School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123239
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327875
Inspection date	19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Kenneth Bush

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)	962
Sixth form	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Osborne
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Hamilton
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	Witney Road Eynsham Witney OX29 4AP
Telephone number	01865 881430
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- achievement overall, including in the sixth form
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels.

Inspection evidence was gathered from: lesson observations; discussions with the headteacher, other senior staff, governors and students; scrutiny of students' work and school documentation; and parental surveys. Some aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own judgements were not justified and these are included in the report.

Description of the school

Bartholomew is an average-sized secondary school situated in a largely rural context. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below that found nationally. The percentage of students identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The great majority of students are of White British origin with a small but increasing proportion whose first language is believed not to be English. The school has had specialist technology college status since 2003 and in 2008 added a second specialism (Thinking Voice) as part of the Leading Edge Partnership Programme. A range of courses for 14 to 16 year old students are offered in partnership with other schools and colleges in West Oxfordshire.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Bartholomew School provides its students with an outstanding education. Under the leadership of the dynamic and forward-looking headteacher and senior leadership team, the school has rapidly and significantly improved in all areas since the previous inspection by raising standards, accelerating rates of progress, improving the quality of teaching and learning and strengthening leadership and management systems. The school has developed ambitious but achievable plans to enable sustained improvement, and to continue to raise the aspirations of staff and students in the future.

Students typically enter Bartholomew with prior attainment just above the national average. By the end of Year 11, however, standards have risen considerably and are now consistently high, including the proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs. Attainment in each of the core subjects is well above national averages, which in the case of mathematics and science reflects the considerable impact of the school's technology specialism. Standards in English are also very high and improving. Since the previous inspection achievement has continued to improve, particularly as the school has increased the rate of progress made by students at Key Stage 3. Boys, too, are now making consistently better progress due to the significant impact of well-focused and timely intervention strategies. As a consequence of the excellent support which they receive, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to that of their peers. Achievement overall, therefore, is now outstanding.

Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They are exceptionally enthusiastic about, and proud of, their school, appreciating the commitment and professionalism of staff, for example as shown in how thoroughly and promptly they feel that their work is marked. Relationships are excellent and contribute significantly to high levels of student motivation and application to their studies. Students show excellent knowledge and understanding of what is required to lead a healthy lifestyle and demonstrate this in practice through high levels of participation in the wide range of sports-related activities on offer. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is of a very high standard, leading to a calm, purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Attendance overall is good and staff are working hard to further reduce the small proportion of students who regularly absent themselves from school.

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now outstanding. The school has rightly put the emphasis on producing consistently high-quality learning outcomes for students and the intensive investment in professional development is making an impact. As a result, lessons are invariably well planned with clear learning objectives routinely shared with students. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they are adept in applying this to suit the different needs of students as they progress through the school. In a Year 10 English lesson seen during the inspection high-attaining students were really challenged to extend their thinking skills in a debate about the complex themes in Arthur Miller's play 'A View From the Bridge'.

Owing to the school's significant extension of the range of courses available at Key Stage 4, both on site and in partner institutions, the curriculum overall is also outstanding. Students of all abilities can now access high-quality courses which provide secure progression routes at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4. Provision for personal, social and health education is excellent, leading to positive outcomes for students across the 11 to 16 age range. The school's specialisms

have been a driving force for improvement, encouraging innovation, collaboration and coherence in course provision, including most recently at Key Stage 3.

The care, guidance and support of students are an outstanding feature of provision and contribute significantly to students' achievement. Students are very well informed about their progress and are given regular and appropriate advice about how best to progress to the next stage of their education. Students at risk of underperformance are identified early and are given rigorous guidance to enable them to fulfil their potential. Those students identified as vulnerable are given particularly effective support and as a result they thrive and achieve very well. Parents, as well as students, are exceptionally complimentary about the quality of pastoral care and transition arrangements from primary school, with one remarking: 'My child has settled very well and is making real progress; we've seen her grow in both confidence and self-esteem.' A few parents commented adversely about the communication between home and school and about provision in some curriculum areas. However, the vast majority of parents are very supportive and strongly endorse the steps that the headteacher and the senior team are taking to improve the school still further.

Leaders and managers at Bartholomew provide exceptionally clear direction and are relentlessly focused on raising standards and improving outcomes for all students. They are well supported and challenged by an increasingly effective governing body who play a significant part in the life of the school. The school's systems for evaluating its own performance are exemplary, resulting in well-focused plans for further improvement both at whole-school and department levels. Robust and sophisticated systems for tracking students' progress help them to consistently reach challenging targets. Inclusion is central to the school's ethos and, consequently, Bartholomew is a tolerant and welcoming community in which equality of opportunity is vigorously promoted. The school has made good progress in establishing its contribution to community cohesion and has clear plans in place for taking the next steps. Links with the wider community are very well established and growing, notably, but not exclusively, forged through the school's specialisms.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards in the sixth form overall are generally above average, although the proportion of students gaining A and B grades at A2 is well above average. There is, however, some variation between subjects both at A2 and AS levels. In 2008 attainment at A2 was strongest in English literature, history and sports studies and weakest in business studies, chemistry and religious studies. Rates of progress in most subjects are increasing as a result of better teaching and excellent provision of academic guidance. Achievement overall is good. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding, reflecting the impact of the strong curriculum provision in this area. Students report that they enjoy school greatly and feel that it makes an excellent contribution to preparing them for higher education, the world of work and adult life generally. Most students undertake community service regularly and act as peer mentors for younger pupils. Students have a very mature outlook and are extremely keen to do well in their studies. A very high percentage of students continue from Year 12 into Year 13. The curriculum is good overall with extensive provision for mathematics and sciences, in particular. The impact of the Learning through Technology objective is clearly evident in the sixth form. Leadership and management are good with improving systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and tracking of students' progress. However, mechanisms to demonstrate students' levels of achievement measured against national benchmarks are not yet fully in place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to improve the level of achievement in the sixth form to match that seen in the main school.
- Develop more effective systems to demonstrate students' progress in the sixth form.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	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?	1	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	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**

08 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Bartholomew School, Witney, OX29 4AP

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you, and were extremely impressed with the pride you have in your school.

Congratulations! I am sure you will be very pleased to discover the main findings of the inspection which are listed below.

- Bartholomew is an outstanding school overall with a good and improving sixth form.
- You reach exceptionally high standards of attainment in the main school, and above average standards in the sixth form.
- Achievement, teaching and learning and the curriculum are outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form.
- Your personal development is outstanding throughout the whole school.
- Staff across the school care for and support you exceedingly well and give you excellent advice and guidance.
- Your school is led and managed outstandingly well and your headteacher has very clear and detailed plans for making it even better.
- The school's specialisms make an extremely positive contribution to your education.

Since your school has been judged outstanding overall, the inspection team believes that the ways in which the school can be improved further are already in your development plan. However, we have asked senior leaders to improve achievement in the sixth form to the outstanding level seen in the main school and develop more effective systems to demonstrate students' progress in the sixth form.

You can do your bit to help by continuing to work as hard as you can and by trying to make your school an even more supportive and thriving community.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you the very best of luck with your studies in the future.

Yours faithfully

Ken Bush

Lead Inspector