

The Lacon Childe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123578
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	327943
Inspection date	1 July 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	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	557
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Val Simpson
Headteacher	Allan Gilhooley
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2006
School address	Love Lane Cleobury Mortimer Kidderminster DY14 8PE
Telephone number	01299 270312
Fax number	01299 271037

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

He evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the quality of English teaching and learning
- how consistently marking informs pupils about how they are performing and how to improve
- how the school promotes community cohesion including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and how pupils learn about different religions and cultures found in Britain today.

He gathered evidence from interviews with parents, governors, staff and pupils, lesson observations, analysis of documentation and observations of the school during the working day. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but he 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 school and specialist sports college is smaller than average and serves both the town and several villages and the edges of nearby towns. The vast majority of pupils travel to school on buses. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average. The school had an Ofsted survey inspection to evaluate the quality of mathematics within the school in October 2007.

The Peter Rabbit Day Nursery is an independently run nursery that is housed on the school site and was not inspected as part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which supports and enthuses pupils well to achieve excellently and reach very high standards. Pupils say they enjoy school a lot because lessons are interesting and support their learning, with many also being fun. They feel teachers are very interested in them as individuals and they can always rely on staff to go that extra mile for them when needed. The mutual respect between staff and pupils is palpable and one which many parents commented upon when they returned their questionnaires. Parents' responses were far more supportive of the school than those usually seen. Any negative comments from a few respondents were counteracted by the vast majority with high quality praise for the school and staff.

Pupils achieve very well. They start school with broadly average standards and make excellent progress to leave with standards which are well above average. The proportion gaining five or more higher level GCSE passes including mathematics and English has been above the national figure for the last few years and the school's records show this year results will be even better. This is partly because standards in English have risen and are now in line with results in other subjects after a slight fall in previous years. Nearly all pupils complete a GCSE in modern foreign languages; with almost half gaining a higher level pass. Results in physical education are very good with all pupils completing a relevant course and gaining suitable accreditation. The school meets its challenging targets.

Enjoyment of school is evident by the excellent behaviour and engagement of pupils. This also shows their very good moral understanding and strong sense of right and wrong. The outstanding curriculum ensures pupils' needs are very well met including those of individuals through a flexible approach to the curriculum in Key Stage 4. For example, provision has been made for pupils to work with a gamekeeper and an equine dentist. The sports college provides a rich variety of extra clubs which many pupils take part in. These include archery and many competitive sports. Bowls has also been introduced and is seen as being effective in supporting a better understanding of different age groups within the local community. There are a variety of arts, drama and music clubs which are enjoyed by many pupils including those few who are not motivated by sport. The school has responded well to the mathematics visit so that now different departments have a good understanding about the correct way to utilise elements of data handling into their own work. Attendance is good with very few pupils taking too much time off school but issues with school buses sometimes impact upon attendance

Pupils take part in many sports and this, along with good eating habits, helps them to keep healthy. The specialist sports status is also an essential part of enhancing pupils' excellent social skills. Through sport, they work very well in teams and also gain valuable experience as leaders, both as junior sports leaders and captaining sides. These skills, along with very good numeracy and literacy skills, ensure pupils are excellently prepared for their futures. The school has improved its provision for religious education since the previous inspection. Pupils in Key Stage 4 take part in a variety of whole-day events to ensure they have a very good understanding of spiritual matters. This is enhanced for some pupils by studying a philosophy and ethics GCSE and through work across the curriculum, for example in English. Pupils take part in many cultural activities within school and make a very good contribution to the local community as well as having a clear understanding of cultures in different parts of the world. In Year 11, pupils visit different places of worship in Birmingham but overall, pupils' understanding of multicultural British society is not as well developed as other areas.

Pupils feel safe in school because they receive excellent pastoral support. Form tutors, play a pivotal role in ensuring pupils remain on track to meet their challenging targets. Additional support and lessons are available as pupils prepare for examinations. Support at the time that pupils start school and preparation for choices in Year 9 and Year 11 are also highly effective. Many parents commented very favourably about the excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils who are in the care of the local authority receive very good support and some are being trained to act as mentors for similar pupils when they arrive in September. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet current requirements.

The outstanding headteacher and senior managers have been instrumental in supporting subject leaders to ensure the quality of teaching, and hence learning, has improved. Now the overall quality is outstanding. Pupils are challenged and fully engaged in their learning. Lessons are well matched to pupils' needs and teachers use questioning well to assess pupils and build upon their prior knowledge. Pupils comment on how teachers not only explain how to do an element of work, but also give it relevance and meaning. This, they say, helps them understand. They also enjoy the many opportunities to take part in practical activities and to work in groups. Marking, which was an issue in the previous inspection, has greatly improved and books are well marked, showing pupils how well they are doing and what to improve. Teachers offer advice and often give pupils instructions or additional work. However, pupils do not always complete these and teachers do not consistently check to see that their advice has been followed. The school uses its specialist status well to support improvements in teaching both within the school itself and by supporting neighbouring primary schools and other secondary schools.

The school takes an active part within the local community and has an action plan on how to enhance its work. The governing body takes a strong lead and has worked closely with primary schools to develop the shared use of a business manager. The school supports many of the local schools with help with physical education (PE) as well as support for language teaching. Governance is excellent in supporting and holding the school to account. Governors also take part in the school's accurate self-assessment and work closely with senior leaders in setting a clear school improvement plan. The successes to date in bringing about sustained improvements show that the school has an excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupils complete tasks or respond to advice when work has been marked.
- Enhance pupils' understanding of society within multicultural Britain.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

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

2 July 2009

Dear Pupils Inspection of the Lacon Childe School, Kidderminster, Worcester, DY14 8PE I visited your school recently, met some of you at lunchtime, and talked to others during lessons and at break. I was very impressed with your friendliness and helpfulness and how proud you are of your school. I agree fully with those of you who told me you attend a stunning school which is judged outstanding. The work you do as junior sports leaders and the number of you who enjoy the very many sports available show the importance of being a specialist sports college.

Staff care for you excellently, and you are very well prepared for each stage of your education, including for college or the world of work. Many of you benefit from a large variety of additional support, including after school and holiday lessons. Those of you who find work difficult receive some excellent additional help.

Standards are well above average and many of you achieve exceptionally well in your GCSE examinations. This is shown by the extremely high proportion of you who gain five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including mathematics and English, and also how nearly all of you of you gain five or more GCSE passes. You enjoy some excellent lessons and a very good curriculum that lets you follow a wide variety of courses. I observed some outstanding teaching and judge that the school has greatly improved the marking of your work. I noticed that some of you did not follow your teacher's instructions to complete or add to your work and I have asked the school to make sure you follow up when advice is given. You can help by making sure you follow instructions to complete or add to your work.

You know how to become healthy and you have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and the dangers that you meet when out of school. You enjoy school and your behaviour is very good. Attendance is high. You learn about many different cultures and have a very good understanding of the local community as well as areas around the world. However, you do not know as much about what it is like to grow up in multicultural Britain today and I have asked the school to help you gain a better understanding.

Your headteacher and the senior management team are very determined that you will all do as well as possible. They are very well supported by the governors. Together, they are constantly monitoring the work of the school to identify what can be improved further.

I wish you well in this excellent school, which many of you told me, is very supportive. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector