

# The Grove School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	123580
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	327945
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1037
Sixth form	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Ingham
Headteacher	Ms Jane Radbourne
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 January 2006
School address	Newcastle Road Market Drayton Shropshire TF9 1HF
Telephone number	01630 652121
Fax number	01630 658980
Email address	admin@grove.biblio.net

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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including a sample of students' books, school and subject self-evaluation and review documents, the school development plan, minutes of the governing body, records of assessment and tracking of students' progress, plans and monitoring information for the support of vulnerable students, records of the school's monitoring of teaching and learning, records of the school's arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of students, policies and procedures for promoting equality and countering discrimination, and 75 parental questionnaire responses.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether standards are high enough, and whether all groups, especially middle and lower attainers, are making adequate progress
- the impact of the school's improvement strategies, and the role of subject leaders in raising standards
- the effectiveness of the school's use of assessment information.

## Information about the school

The school is of an average size with a relatively small sixth form. It is the only secondary school in the town, and also attracts students from the surrounding rural areas. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is average. Most students are White British, and only two are in the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. Student mobility into and out of the school is relatively high, and partly affected by the mobility of army families. A low proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but the proportion with statements of special educational needs is above average. A wide range of needs is catered for, including sensory impairment, but most students with learning difficulties have behavioural, emotional and social needs or moderate learning difficulties. Eight looked-after children are on roll.

The school has been a language college since 2002 and achieved re-designation in 2007. It achieved the Healthy Schools full award and Investors in People re-designation in 2008. The current headteacher took up post shortly after the last inspection in 2006.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

### Main findings

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. Overall attainment has risen in line with the national trend since the last inspection and is broadly average, which represents satisfactory progress for students. The effectiveness of leadership in driving improvement is satisfactory. The headteacher has significantly strengthened the school procedures for setting targets and monitoring for students' progress. This has empowered senior managers, subject leaders and heads of house to identify students who are underachieving and to take action. Capacity to improve at all levels in the school is therefore satisfactory and developing well, and the school has a generally accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. As a consequence, the school is beginning to address areas of underperformance which have held back the rate of improvement in attainment. Significant progress has been made, for example in raising boys' attainment and the standards in English. Many of the school's data systems are, however, relatively new, and whilst the use of data and monitoring information has improved, it is not always used sharply enough. This applies to the analysis of student progress and monitoring attendance figures which, although broadly average, feature too many persistent absentees.

The very broad curriculum offered to students is enriched by extensive local and international partnerships with schools, colleges, businesses and other organisations. The wide range of visits, residential trips and extra-curricular activities contribute strongly to students' enjoyment and to their understanding of how they can make a positive contribution to the school, local and global communities. The school's development as a language college is very effective in supporting these programmes and outcomes, although students' attainment in modern foreign languages is falling short of targets. Students are given many strong opportunities to reflect on the world around them, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Sixth formers are encouraged to develop their skills in working with others, whether through their involvement in mentoring schemes for younger students or by developing leadership skills as community sports leaders and on the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. The strong ethos and positive attitudes help to underpin sixth formers' rising standards and good achievement.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. The majority of lessons are characterised by very good constructive relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves. However, students' progress slows in a significant minority of lessons because teachers do not always employ effective strategies (such as

targeted questioning or work matched to differing abilities) to ensure all are fully engaged and enthused. Middle attaining students make least progress and are not always suitably challenged in class. More vulnerable students, however, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, looked after children and those with English as an additional language, receive high quality care to ensure that they make at least satisfactory progress. More widely, the care, guidance and support for the personal development, safety and well-being of students are highly regarded by students and their parents and are major strengths of the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rate of progress made by students, and especially for middle attaining groups by:
  - ensuring that teaching challenges and engages all students in their learning
  - targeting questions at less forthcoming students, and drawing out considered and reflective responses from all
  - planning tasks which are matched to different abilities in the class
  - ensuring sufficient variety of activities to enliven learning, especially in double lessons.
- Sharpen the use of data and assessment information to offer a more detailed analysis and evaluation of:
  - progress of groups of students in all subjects, across all years, and across the whole school
  - the attendance patterns for different groups of students.

## How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3
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Having arrived in the school with broadly average standards, students generally make satisfactory progress, so that by the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is broadly in line with national levels. GCSE results in 2008 were relatively weak, with particular concerns around declining English results and evidence that a significant proportion of students in the middle ability range did not make the progress expected.

Improvements have been made in both regards. The English department has set in place successful strategies to lift results for Year 11 students, including a focus on raising performance of middle attainers through intervention programmes, leading to an improvement in their writing skills. Sometimes in other subjects, however, such students are not sufficiently engaged in lessons or challenged to make better progress, and they are too content to work slowly. Higher attainers often receive a good degree of challenge, for example through a demanding curriculum in the top sets which brings them a high number of qualifications. One such group in Year 8, for example, made brisk progress in solving equations with inverse functions.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Again, their needs are often well met by the curriculum, which offers a range of very

practical and applied courses. Boys' standards have improved markedly since the last inspection, closing the gap with those reached by girls.

Most students' attendance is satisfactory, but above average levels of persistent absence means that the school has not met its attendance targets. Students' preparation for the next stage of their education is satisfactory, given their average standards of literacy and numeracy. However, students develop very effective wider skills of leadership and team working by engaging in collaborative tasks in lessons and contributing to the school and community. Students' behaviour is satisfactory; they generally behave well in lessons, although there is some boisterousness in corridors and social areas. Nonetheless, they feel very safe in the school, and they and their parents speak very favourably of the speed with which the school acts on any concerns. High levels of participation in sports programmes and clubs make an effective contribution to students' health and well-being, although healthy eating is not always a high priority for them.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	3
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	3
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

## The quality of the school's work

While satisfactory overall, there are good features of teaching and learning. These include:

- the good relationships which prevail in most classrooms and which help to stimulate good enjoyment of lessons and positive attitudes to learning
- very specific good quality individual education plans for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which are used effectively in a number of lessons to focus on the development of students' skills
- teachers and students actively evaluating the learning together so that students are clear about how to refine and improve their work, as seen in drama lessons in Years 8 and 13.

<sup>1</sup> Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The shortcomings in teaching and learning centre on the lack of engagement of some students in their learning. Homework is not consistently set in Key Stage 3.

Assessment is satisfactory overall. It is used to increasingly good effect to set students targets, monitor their progress and to take action where necessary. Reports to parents are regular and clear, and parents feel that this is a strength of the school. Students mostly have a good understanding of their targets and their current levels of performance. They are not, however, always so clear about what they need to do to reach the next level. The quality of marking and feedback to students varies. It is of a very high quality in English and art, where teachers give students very specific guidance on the 'next steps' to improvement.

The curriculum is a key strength of the school. It supports students' achievement by offering a rich range of academic and vocational subjects. Students have a good understanding of their progression routes into post-16 education, and very few leave school without going into employment, education or training. In Key Stage 4, however, most students follow a heavy programme of GCSE and other courses, and the school accepts that careful guidance is needed to ensure that such a diet is appropriate for all. The curriculum and other activities make a significant contribution to students' personal development. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been well designed to develop key skills across subjects.

The school provides a caring and supportive environment for young people to develop. For example, the community members and sixth form pupils who are involved in the mentoring of vulnerable young people make an outstanding contribution to their outcomes, particularly around attendance. Students have access to good advice on the next stages of their education, and parents express satisfaction with how well their children settle into the school when joining Year 7.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	2

## How effective are leadership and management?

The development of coherent systems for setting performance targets and measuring progress, led by the headteacher, has been a powerful tool for communicating ambition and the need to raise standards across the school. Comprehensive subject review cycles and fortnightly meetings between subject leaders and senior managers have strengthened self-evaluation and led to increasing involvement of middle leaders in monitoring the quality in subjects. However, the impact of these improvements is yet to be fully felt. There is some way to go, for example in refining the use of data to ensure that the school can readily evaluate the progress of different groups.

Governors are highly skilled and know the school very well, through detailed scrutiny of its work and strong and regular links with aspects of the school's work. They help to ensure that the school very effectively meets its duty to promote equality and tackle discrimination, by regularly updating policies and receiving reports on the good progress the school has made in this area. At the time of the inspection, the school met requirements for the safeguarding of pupils, although there is a need to ensure that all records on staff are promptly and appropriately updated.

Programmes set in place as a result of the school's specialist language college designation have helped the school to make a significant contribution to community cohesion, by developing good cultural and global awareness among students. The school also works very effectively with local partners to encourage students to positively contribute to their more immediate community.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	3
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

## Sixth form

Standards have risen sharply in the sixth form over the last two years. Attainment is now above average and students make good progress. Retention rates are good, and although some students drop subjects after consultation, they remain at college. Students value the freedom and independence they are allowed and the mutual respect in relationships between them and their teachers. Careers guidance is good, and a high proportion of students go on to university. Students readily take on responsibilities, for example by sports leadership in school and at feeder primary schools, and by serving on the school council and sixth form committee. Punctuality to lessons, however, is often poor. Students consistently arrive late to lessons even at the start of the day and after breaks.

Teaching and learning are good overall, although small group sizes in some subjects limits the opportunities for interaction between students. Students are nonetheless positive about the teaching they receive and the level of individual support that teachers provide. The sixth form offers a very wide range of curriculum opportunities and is beginning to attract students from other schools in addition to greater numbers of Grove students. The curriculum is flexible enough to meet the individual needs of students so that high achieving students are able to pick up extra subjects,



some in partnership with the local college. There is a range of successful vocational courses. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to follow their interests, such as through the 'journalism group'. The sixth form is well led. The sixth form team of tutors know their students well and provide individualised support according to need.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

The views of parents who responded to the questionnaire were highly positive. Many expressed their appreciation of the very wide range of opportunities provided by the school, in and out of class, and how these help their children enjoy school. There was also a strong view that the school is quick to respond to the concerns of parents. Parents feel well informed about their children's progress. A very small number of parents were concerned that homework was inconsistently set in Key Stage 3, and that marking was unhelpful. Inspectors agree that homework is inconsistently set in Key Stage 3 and, as the report indicates, that the quality of marking varies.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Grove School, Market Drayton, TF9 1HF

Many thanks for the welcome you gave me and my colleagues when we visited the school. We much appreciated the time many of you gave to conversations with us, and your courtesy in showing us around the school.

The Grove gives you a satisfactory education. It helps you to reach standards which are broadly average and to make satisfactory progress. Its great strength is the very wide range of subjects, courses and activities it offers. This clearly helps you enjoy school and to develop good skills in working together and showing initiative. You have many opportunities to contribute to your own community and to learn about others through your international links. The school cares for you well and ensures that you feel safe. Your parents told us how much they valued the school's swift response if they have cause for concern.

Teaching is satisfactory and there are many strong features in the lessons, especially the good relationships between staff and students in most classes. However, there is a need in some classes to make sure that all students are fully engaged in the lessons, by drawing them fully into activities and planning work which is well matched to their abilities. Teachers are using assessment systems increasingly well to set you targets and keep you on track to reach them. Information from such assessments needs to be used more intensively, for example to monitor more effectively the progress and attendance patterns of groups of students.

The school now needs to focus on improving progress for students, and especially for those in the middle of the ability range, such as those in Year 11 on the grade C/D borderline. The leaders and managers of the school have clear ideas about how to do this, and have made a satisfactory start in driving this improvement. You can help by working hard to meet your targets and attending regularly.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
Lead inspector

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