

Charlton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123597
Local Authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	327949
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Doug Boynton
Headteacher	Nick Renshaw
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Severn Drive Dothill Wellington Telford TF1 3LE
Telephone number	01952 386800
Fax number	01952 386805

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Charlton school is a larger than average secondary school. There are lower than average proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Measures of economic prosperity in the area where the school is situated are higher than average. There is a lower than average proportion of students with statements of special educational needs. The school became a specialist science and mathematics college in 2005. In September 2008, the school entered into partnership with its neighbouring primary school as part of a 'learning community' development that aims to provide a more closely integrated education from ages 1 to 16. A new principal, with overall responsibility for both schools, and a new head of secondary phase took up post 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

Charlton is a good school, where students gain high standards in a large number of subjects. They achieve well in these academic studies and in their personal development. Teaching is good, thanks to experienced and enthusiastic staff with good subject knowledge. This ensures a very positive learning ethos in almost all lessons. Students remarked on the high commitment of staff to help with explaining ideas and concepts. Staff and students share a strong sense of loyalty to the school and enjoy working hard together. The new leadership team quickly responded to evidence from the 2008 GCSE results. This showed that a few of the more able students who were entered early for examinations in Year 10, despite gaining high standards, did not progress at the same good rate as most other students. The school has adjusted its examination entry policy to make sure that most final GCSE examinations of key subjects are now at the end of Year 11. Leadership and management are good, because they set clear direction for improvement and development and respond effectively to improve outcomes when these are identified as less than good.

The school has made substantial improvements in the care, guidance and support of all students since the previous inspection. This has resulted in good personal, social, moral and spiritual development for all students, including an outstanding engagement by almost all students with a healthy lifestyle. Students monitor their own fitness with the support of the physical education department, and the majority eat well in the school dining area. The school provides effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with good in-class support from teaching assistants, a learning support centre, and an inclusion unit on site. Students participate in many social, charitable and decision-making activities within and outside of the school, resulting in an excellent contribution to the school and local community. The good partnership arrangements established as part of the specialist college programme have made a substantial impact with primary pupils, and in adult education opportunities. This status has also brought tangible benefits to educational resources, including some refurbished science laboratories and improved information and technology services that are well used by staff and students. The school prepares students well for their next steps in life, and almost all of them progress successfully to further education settings.

Most lessons are good, with the majority of students making good progress when tasks are challenging and interesting. However, in some cases, lessons do not reflect planning that takes full account of the range of abilities and prior knowledge of students; these lessons assume that the class are all at the same level. Marking is usually, but not consistently, accurate and diagnostic and has good advice for students on what they should do next. In general, however, students do not do it! There is no consistent expectation for students to respond to this good advice on a day-to-day basis.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consistently plan lessons to engage and interest students by matching tasks to their prior knowledge and ability.
- Regularly mark the day-to-day work of the students, with diagnostic comments about what is good and what might be improved, and then provide time for students to respond and make corrections to their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Results in 2008 public examinations matched the targets set for the school. The average points score per student for their best eight subjects increased compared to 2007 and remains significantly higher than average. The overall average score per student was very high, as a consequence of the large numbers of subjects at GCSE taken by many students, some when they were in Year 10. The progress of almost all students was good, although not as strong as in previous years. Over time, attainment on entry has been slightly above the national average. The school has recognised that for some subjects, and students, taking GCSE examinations early may not be the most appropriate option. This showed in the relatively ordinary progress of some more able students who sat examinations in Year 10, and gained B grades instead of A grades. The school changed its GCSE entry policy so that now the current Year 11 is performing better, at the same stage, than last year's cohort. Good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures they make equally good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school ensures almost all students develop healthy lifestyles, thanks to close monitoring of their fitness, and the provision of good food with a wide range of healthy options. Students behave well around the school, and in most lessons. However, where teaching does not match their abilities and interests, some students become uncooperative. The vast majority of teachers have no need to use the school's behaviour policies, but students did say that a few staff, when they used it, applied it inconsistently. The contribution of students to their school and the wider community is excellent, and mirrored in the strong sense of loyalty students feel for the school. They are supportive of one another, and work hard to help younger students as they prepare for secondary school. The good attendance figures are a clear testimony to the high levels of enjoyment that students experience in school. Students say that the school deals swiftly with isolated cases of bullying, and almost all said they felt safe in school. However, some said that some toilet facilities were not pleasant, mainly because of 'who was hanging out' around them, rather than their physical condition.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In most lessons students enjoy their work, behave well and make good progress. This is because teachers have good subject knowledge that they use effectively to engage and enthuse students. In almost every lesson observed by inspectors, relationships between the teacher and students were very good, ensuring that students could ask for help. This also created a positive working ethos in lessons that encouraged students to work independently and so allowed the teacher to target support to particular individuals seeking help. Teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) effectively in delivering whole-class instruction. Students developed ICT skills themselves within lessons, using it for research, simulation and the recording of information. However, some lesson plans rely upon pitching the lesson at a level thought to match that of the class or set. These do not fully accommodate the range of abilities and

prior knowledge of students. The quality and consistency of day-to-day marking also varies, from examples of excellent diagnosis, encouragement and advice, to perfunctory ticks and large amounts of student work going unchecked. Some students said that homework was not always marked. Students did not usually respond to the advice or carry out the corrections suggested.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a very wide range of subjects that provide good academic and vocational pathways for all learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most students studied many more than ten subjects at Key Stage 4, because they complete the Key Stage 3 curriculum one year earlier than usual, in Year 8. The school has recently reduced the total number of subjects studied in Key Stage 4, and for some key subjects, delayed final examinations to the end of Year 11. Already, evidence from 'mock' examinations shows higher standards compared with the previous year. There are excellent opportunities for students to take part in extra-curricular activities and school trips. This curriculum enrichment provision is very popular with students. Good curriculum links with partner primary schools, all of which are supported through the specialist science college funding, help ensure good progression to secondary school. There are excellent partnerships with local colleges that provide good vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4. Progression to further education is also very good because of strong partnerships with local providers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Systems for safeguarding students are reliable and rigorous, and meet current requirements. The support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, resulting in their progress being slightly better, in relative terms, to their peers. Recent developments in supporting students with behavioural difficulties have sharply reduced exclusions, although the school had not been monitoring disciplinary sanctions by ethnicity. Students confirm that they get good advice on their next stages in life, and almost all continue in education or training. A significant minority of parents said, with some justification, that the school did not inform them well enough about their children's progress. The school has introduced very detailed systems to track students' progress and direct intervention where it notices students to be underperforming. This tracking of individual students' progress is helping to better match the curriculum to their needs, and to direct extra help where it is needed. This works particularly well for students of average ability. The school has used this information in a very detailed, but complicated, report for parents. Some parents understandably had concerns about the information they get about their children's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Strong and innovative strategic leadership over time has ensured good curriculum development. Governors clearly set the strategic agenda, including the development of a local 'learning community', and are determined to maintain as broad a curriculum as possible at Key Stage 4. The school's work to promote community cohesion is good, thanks to a very wide range of provision matched to a clear audit of need. The school has met its statutory academic targets,

and most of its specialist college targets; the exception (72% science GCSE higher grades) was an artefact of science targets based on an unusually high set of results in 2004 being used to set the target. It is a feature of this good strategic leadership that it continues to try new models for educational provision, and is perceptive enough to respond quickly if such models do not work as well as expected. The frequent use of progress data in tracking progress towards challenging targets by departmental managers has been a recent development. There had also been a limited expectation that middle managers should play a key role in monitoring day-to-day routines. This has allowed some inconsistencies to persist in assessment practice, lesson planning, and to students expressing some concerns over the lack of consistency between teachers in their use of the behaviour and rewards policy. The school has improved care and guidance, resulting in better personal development. It has also widened the curriculum and improved many areas of the school's physical resources. It is meeting its challenging targets overall, and is demonstrating a good capacity for further improvement.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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
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**

13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Charlton School, Wellington, TF1 3LE

Thank you for your positive and good-humoured responses to our questions during the inspection of your school. We agree with you that Charlton is a good school, and in particular, we are pleased with the improvements it has made since the previous inspection in its care, guidance and support for all students. This is ensuring you are developing good personal skills, a very healthy lifestyle, and make a good contribution to your school and its wider community. You are able to study a wide range of subjects, and often gain qualifications earlier than Year 11. This can be helpful, but might also mean that in a few cases, the grades you get are not as high as they might have been. The school has responded to this by delaying examinations in some key subjects.

- The best feature of the school is found in the very positive relationships between students and staff in almost all lessons. This is partly due to your teachers' good subject knowledge and expertise and to your own commitment to learning. You note how helpful teachers are, and the large number of additional activities, clubs, trips and visits that help enrich the curriculum. To improve provision further, the school should address the following aspects of teaching and learning.
- Most classes are 'set' in terms of the academic levels of the students; these classes still contain a wide range of abilities. Sometimes, tasks in lessons do not match those abilities well enough. This can lead to a lack of challenge for you, or a lack of engagement by you in the task.
- When teachers mark your work, it is usually accurate and diagnostic, and they write straightforward suggestions for improvement. However, most of the time, you are not in the habit of acting upon that advice, for example by making the corrections suggested, or completing the missing work.

Best wishes for your future

Yours faithfully

Brian Cartwright

Her Majesty's Inspector