

Colmers School - A Specialist Sports and Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103563
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336109
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1039
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Hughes
Headteacher	Peter Jones
Date of previous school inspection	3 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 31 lessons, saw 36 teachers and held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at lesson observation records, policies, the school's improvement plan and data about students' performance in the current year. Inspectors considered 410 parental questionnaires.

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

- progress made by higher ability students
- students' independent learning skills
- how teachers are ensuring improved progress in students' literacy and language skills
- the effectiveness of actions taken to improve attendance.

Information about the school

Colmers is an average-sized school. It has held specialist sports college status since 2004 and a second specialism in science since 2008. The school's stability is very high; almost all students start at Year 7 and remain at the school until Year 11. A high percentage of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The percentage of students from minority ethnic groups is much lower than average. Almost all students have English as their first language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is considerably higher than average. The school has been working closely in support of a neighbouring secondary school since May 2009.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Colmers is a popular, friendly, safe and very successful school. A high level of commitment to each individual student's success permeates all of the school's work. Almost all groups of students make outstanding progress during their time at Colmers. The standards they reach are above average. Students make considerable gains in their personal and social development, and are well prepared for their next steps in education or employment. Students develop a strong set of moral values and are respectful of different cultures and beliefs; their behaviour is often exemplary. Their spiritual development, however, is less well advanced. Students learn to think for themselves particularly well and become confident in working independently. They make an outstanding contribution to school and community life. Students' attendance has improved and is above average.

Most teaching is of very high quality. Teachers enthuse and interest students with a wide variety of activities. Students have very good attitudes to learning and learn quickly and effectively. More able students are provided with significant challenge. Assessment supports learning well, although some marking is not of a consistently high quality. The curriculum is broad and full of interest and appeal for students. It is considerably enhanced by the integration of the school's specialisms of sport and science. Literacy and language support are good. Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that all students are nurtured and guided carefully through school life.

The headteacher's strong and effective leadership skills along with well established management procedures ensure the school sustains and further improves its high levels of achievement. Data are used well to monitor performance at all levels and for all groups. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Any areas identified for improvement are tackled promptly and effectively. These features, along with a stable and highly committed staff, support the school's outstanding capacity to improve.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and robust. Experienced governors provide good support and challenge to the school but have not ensured that statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity are fully met. Equality of opportunity is promoted well but equality policies are insufficiently comprehensive and not enough formal monitoring of actions takes place. Collaboration with a wide range of partners, including parents and carers is highly beneficial. The school's finances are managed well and it provides outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Promote students' spiritual development by maximising opportunities to engage

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students in reflection and quiet thought, where appropriate, at all levels of study and in all aspects of the school's work.

- Raise the quality of the marking of written work to be consistently high by ensuring that:
 - marking is undertaken frequently in all subject areas
 - teachers' written feedback is detailed and contains explicit guidance on how students can improve their work.
- Ensure that statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity are fully met by:
 - strengthening the school's equality of opportunity policy to ensure it gives full coverage of the general duties that apply to the three equality strands of gender, race and disability and includes arrangements for assessing the impact of the policy on students, staff and parents
 - ensuring that actions to promote equality are drawn together into a single plan and monitored closely by senior managers and governors
 - publishing annually, where reasonably practicable, the results of monitoring.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Inspectors' observations of lessons and scrutiny of students' work confirm that most students make outstanding progress during their time at school. Most students start school with below average prior attainment but achieve standards of work that are above average by the time they leave school. They learn quickly and effectively and take great pride in their work. Examination results have improved since the last inspection. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at A* to C increased markedly in 2008/09 to be significantly above average. Standards in English and mathematics dipped to below average in the same year, from a previously much stronger position. However, standards in the current year are much improved based on inspectors' observations of work and the school's records of progress. Results in the school's specialist subjects are particularly good for those students on vocational courses, where nearly all students achieve their qualification aims. All groups of students achieve equally well.

Students' enjoyment of all aspects of school life is high; they are full of praise for how Colmers helps them gain confidence and maturity as well as a wide range of skills which prepare them well for the future. Students demonstrate in many ways the effectiveness of the school's work in educating them about health, safety, and physical fitness, moral and ethical values and in broadening their experience of the wider world. For example, the school council involves students from all levels in an active and influential forum that tackles not only practical issues such as healthy food choices but also whole school matters such as the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Students take on leadership roles keenly. Senior students take on subject leadership roles where they help and support younger students' learning. Students make an outstanding contribution to charitable work.

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Specialist sports college status ensures that students' participation in a wide range of physical activities is very high. The school's inclusive culture based on fairness and equity for all permeates students' lives and helps them understand and adopt a strong set of moral values. The brisk pace and high levels of challenge within daily school life sometimes preclude opportunities for pause and quiet reflection in support of students' spiritual development, which is not yet a strong feature of students' personal and social development.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Students are respectful to others and keen to engage with peers, staff and visitors. They often show remarkable insight and considerable creativeness, along with a proactive approach that does not rely on teachers to lead the way, in both lessons and in their wider participation in school life. Students' attendance has improved to above average and they are rarely late.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Most lessons are at least good with examples of outstanding lessons in nearly all

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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subjects. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, use a brisk pace and give clear explanations of concepts and ideas. They use an excellent variety of activities which are often carefully tailored to meet individual students' needs, including providing considerable challenge for more able students. Questions used are often complex and probing, and promote the use of high order skills. Students frequently respond well and provide full, accurate and thoughtful answers. Teachers' high aspirations for students motivate most of them to do their best consistently. In particular, teachers are very skilled in making students think and act for themselves. Students readily and confidently use the school's well-developed virtual learning environment, demonstrating their independent learning skills well. Teaching assistants work seamlessly with teachers and their impact on supporting learning is significant.

Assessment is used constructively to support learning. Peer and self-assessment are used particularly well, with excellent examples in drama, physical education and geography. Students receive considerable ongoing, constructive feedback, including immediate verbal feedback of high quality, which they value. Marking is very beneficial where it diagnoses weaknesses, provides specific guidance on how to improve, and is acted upon by students. This good practice, however, is not consistent across, and within, all subject areas. A minority of superficial or infrequent marking is apparent in most subjects.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with clear pathways and which is strongly enhanced by the school's specialisms. Partnerships and community work in the specialist subjects are also very productive and beneficial for all involved. The freedom of option choice available at Key Stage 4 motivates students and the use of different qualification aims which match students' ability has become a strong feature through introduction of a broader range of vocational courses. The 'Learning for Life' course, covering a wide range of personal and social skills, is well established, highly rated by students, of high quality and having a very beneficial impact across the school's work. Literacy is developed well across the curriculum including using projects across Year 6 and Year 7 with feeder primary schools.

The school's record of providing outstanding care, guidance and support for a wide range of students, including a significant number who are highly vulnerable, has been strongly sustained. Senior managers provide a strong steer and a 'hands-on' approach to supporting students as valued individuals. Pastoral support has been enhanced through increased expertise in providing support for students with complex learning disabilities and/or difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorder. Pastoral teams have very strong links with specialist external agencies. Communication between staff, parents and carers is good. The school's relentless work to improve attendance is effective. Persistent absenteeism has reduced. Rewards and sanctions are used constructively and students know clearly what is right and wrong. The transition points both into and at the various points through school life are managed with considerable expertise.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Managers at all levels share the ambition, enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated so ably in the experienced and inspirational headteacher. His exceptional leadership skills, along with a sharp focus on developing uncomplicated and highly effective management practices, have ensured the school has moved from strength to strength. The management approach across the school of devolving responsibility and working openly, involving students wherever possible, has increased managers' accountability, skill and confidence. Managers work very well together as a cohesive team to tackle any areas in need of improvement. Data on students' performance are used very well to monitor their progress. Staff development activities are numerous, of high quality and very beneficial to all staff.

The governing body are experienced and fulfil most of their role highly effectively. They provide challenge to managers and scrutinise aspects of the school's work thoroughly. They support the inclusive work of the school well. Their initiative to strengthen scrutiny of safeguarding across the school is appropriate but they have not ensured that statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity have been met fully.

Senior managers' skill in working productively with partners has brought many benefits, including numerous opportunities for valuable staff development as a result of supporting a neighbouring school. Initiatives to engage with parents and carers are productive and help in sustaining high levels of achievement. The web-based portal is being developed further to extend parental access. Parents are supported to learn new skills as part of the school's approach to including everyone in students' success. Close work on attendance along with constant reinforcement of its importance with parents and carers has helped in increasing attendance rates.

Providing equality of opportunity for all is central to the school's work and managers and teachers ensure that every student is treated as an individual with equal success across student groups. The performance of different groups of students is monitored closely and any gaps that emerge are identified quickly and actions put in place to close the gap. However, equality policies are lightweight and do not provide comprehensive coverage of the school's general duties relative to race, gender and disability. Formal monitoring, impact assessment and publishing, where reasonable, of the results of equality actions have not been given enough attention.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and comprehensive. Students are encouraged to think about safety in all that they do; a focus on e-safety has helped develop students'

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knowledge of the risks involved with using the internet. The school knows its local community well and the school's work to promote community cohesion has a highly beneficial impact on community life. The links established with local organisations are used purposefully as part of the promotion of community cohesion. The school works closely with local police to tackle behaviour issues and 'hotspots' of potential trouble in the community which might involve students from the school.

The school is very well maintained, including well kept flower beds and open plan areas, tidy and clean. Staff deployment is effective and support staff and teachers work well together. The school is in good financial health and manages its budgets carefully and to good effect. It is considerably over-subscribed. The school provides outstanding value for money evident in the high levels of success and future social and economic preparedness of its students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The response from parents and carers was high and provided further strong evidence of engagement of stakeholders in the work of the school. Most parents agreed with all the statements and almost all agreed that teaching at the school was good. Concern about the school's approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour was noted by a few parents; however, inspectors found that staff dealt promptly and effectively with poor behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Colmers School - A Specialist Sports and Science College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 410 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1039 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	136	33	230	56	29	7	11	3
The school keeps my child safe	174	42	212	52	15	4	6	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	219	53	177	43	10	2	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	189	46	199	49	18	4	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	186	45	213	52	9	2	2	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	138	34	236	58	28	7	2	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	108	26	250	61	39	10	5	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	143	35	242	59	12	3	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	145	35	230	56	24	6	5	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	168	41	188	46	26	6	20	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	102	25	248	60	29	7	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	173	42	209	51	17	4	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	201	49	183	45	17	4	7	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Colmers School - A Specialist Sports and Science College, Birmingham, B45 9NY

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We found our discussions with you interesting, productive and informative. Inspectors were impressed by the level of maturity and clarity of thought that many of you displayed. We judged your school to be outstanding in its overall effectiveness. Most of you achieve very well and the standard of your work is above average. You learn quickly and develop well as independent learners. Your personal and social development, including in areas such as teamwork and leadership skills, is excellent. However, inspectors judged that your spiritual development is less well advanced. Your attendance has improved and you are very punctual.

You told us that teaching is very good and we agree. We observed mainly good and outstanding lessons in which your behaviour and attitudes to learning were mostly exemplary. Assessment supports learning well but some marking is not as helpful as it could be in guiding you to improve your work. The curriculum meets your needs well and is enhanced by the specialist aspects of sport and science. Many of you told us how much you value the many and varied extra-curricular activities that take place. Teachers care for you very well and give you much good guidance as you go through school.

The headteacher and senior managers make sure that the school keeps improving. They work very well with partners and with your parents and carers to ensure that school life helps you to succeed in every respect. The arrangements to keep you safe are very strong. All the staff make sure that everyone has an equal chance of success; however, some of the equality policies and action plans are not as detailed as they should be. These are the actions that we have asked your school to take to improve further:

- place more emphasis on developing spirituality wherever opportunities occur in school life
- pay more attention to ensuring that written marking is detailed and contains specific advice on how to improve
- ensure that equality of opportunity policies and action plans are detailed and cover all aspects of the school's work.

Congratulations on all that you do within the school and community including your help with charitable causes and in support of pupils in local primary schools.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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