

Prospect School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110106
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	337441
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Daniel Burton HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1126
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marjorie Caballero
Headteacher	Ms Deborah Ajose
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 31 lessons and saw 30 teachers teach. They also visited an additional seven lessons and observed a Year 8 assembly. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of students. The majority of time was spent looking at the quality of learning. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at policies, data and analyses, including the school's self-evaluation, governors' minutes and 136 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, together with questionnaires completed by students and staff.

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

- the impact of the curriculum on students' achievements
- students' progress in English and science
- the effectiveness of provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who learn in 'The Bridge'
- the effectiveness of the sixth form, with particular regard to the progress made by students taking AS and A level courses.

Information about the school

Prospect School is a larger school than average. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are above average, with a small minority at the early stages of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average and includes students with learning difficulties, including specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The school has a resource base called 'The Bridge' which caters for up to 30 students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school was awarded specialist status in sports and information and communication technology (ICT) in September 2008.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Prospect School has improved very significantly since its last inspection and now provides a good quality of education. Leaders and managers have used their acute understanding of students' needs exceptionally well to ensure that provision enables all to succeed. Most striking has been the transformation of the curriculum. This has ensured that almost all students leave school with valuable qualifications to help ensure their future economic well-being. The curriculum has had a major impact in improving students' enjoyment and behaviour. Levels of motivation, self-confidence and determination to succeed have improved dramatically. As a result, students now achieve well at the school and attainment, although low, is rising quickly.

The quality of care, guidance and support is a key strength of the school and makes a very significant contribution to the outstanding progress that students make. Intensive support is given to students new to the United Kingdom so that their basic literacy skills develop quickly. Rigorous revision programmes, including residential weekends for English and mathematics, have had a marked impact on helping to raise students' achievements in these subjects.

These improvements to provision are now well embedded and reflect the school's effectiveness in improving the life chances of all students in its care. Most strategies to promote school improvement have been extremely successful because they are based on very accurate self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, inspectors judge that the school has good capacity to improve further.

The quality of teaching has also improved significantly since the last inspection. The inspectors observed no inadequate lessons and saw many good features. However, teachers did not always communicate their high expectations sufficiently well for students to know what they needed to do to secure the outstanding progress intended. In some lessons, work was not sufficiently matched to the needs of all learners so that while work was too easy for some, it was too difficult for others. School monitoring systems have not yet ensured that best practice in teaching is shared so that teaching is consistently good across the school.

Students are increasingly well equipped to discuss the quality of their own learning and other aspects of school provision. However, they are not yet routinely given opportunities to participate in decision-making regarding issues which affect their learning and well-being. Opportunities for students to take on leadership roles are not yet fully exploited.

The headteacher and her team are highly respected for the work they have done to improve the school. One parent, typifying the views of many others, commented, 'I

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think the headteacher has done a brilliant job since she has been here.' Another commented, 'I feel totally confident that my children are happy at Prospect School because of the enthusiastic teaching and superb curriculum.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons by:
 - ensuring that students know how to make good or better progress in all lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers make good use of assessment so that work in lessons is closely matched to the needs of all learners
 - strengthening strategies to share the very best practice in teaching and learning.
- Provide more opportunities for students to take leadership roles and engage in decision-making with regard to issues which affect their learning and well-being.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

From starting points well below average, students make outstanding progress in their learning overall with the result that the proportion who leave the school with five or more GCSE grades at A* to C is above average. Current students are making good progress in English, mathematics and science and attainment, although low, is rising quickly. The vast majority of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress and progress for many is outstanding, including in English and mathematics. This is because of the excellent specialist support they receive to complement their work in lessons. Most students who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress because of the school's highly effective support to boost their language skills.

Students enjoy coming to school and particularly appreciate the excellent curriculum. They arrive punctually for lessons and often exhibit excellent behaviour. Although in the less effective lessons behaviour is sometimes only satisfactory, inspectors agree with the very large majority of students who reported that behaviour is good overall. Students make the most progress when lessons are well paced, challenging and matched closely to their needs and interests. For example, in an ICT lesson, students were highly engaged in their investigations into software design and development because targets and feedback were highly personalised so that all knew what they had to do to make excellent progress. In another lesson seen, students made excellent progress as they learned to draft technical letters to shareholders because challenging work was accompanied by sharply-focused support from the teacher and teaching assistant. In a less successful Year 8 lesson, students became distracted because the pace of learning was too slow and the teacher did not establish sufficiently high expectations with regard to learning and behaviour.

All groups of students report that they feel safe in school and value the improved supervision arrangements at break and lunchtime. Students' commitment to healthy

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lifestyles is improving and benefits from three hours of physical education per week. Involvement in extra-curricular activities, including sport, while strong in some year groups, is not yet sufficiently consistent across the school. Students are committed to helping each other and members of the wider community through their work as junior sports leaders, fundraising activities for charitable causes and visits to local primary schools. The student council is led effectively by older students but does not yet sufficiently empower students to help shape the direction of the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The outstanding curriculum has helped transform students' aspirations and attitudes to learning. A very wide range of courses are available, including 14 to 19 Diplomas and BTECs. Other courses, accredited, for example, by the Institute of the Motor Industry, ensure that the needs and interests of all learners are fully met. Changes to the curriculum are also driving up achievement in more traditional subjects. The science curriculum has been adapted to ensure that far more students can now achieve at least two qualifications. Year 9 English students take a one year GCSE course in media

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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studies. Curricular innovation is evident through, for example, the fortnightly 'Focus Fridays'. Separate curricular pathways are provided for students who need more support in Years 7 and 8. The school's specialist status in sports and ICT has a significant and growing impact on the curriculum. Strong links with the ICT department contribute to improving attainment in English, mathematics and science. Gifted and talented physical education students complete a short-course GCSE in Year 9 and sixth form students are able to complete qualifications in football coaching.

The school is rigorous in its use of data to identify and support students who are at risk of underachieving. Support for more vulnerable learners, including looked after children, is highly effective and was described as 'excellent' by one student. Students who speak English as an additional language, and those who join the school other than at the usual time of admission, appreciate the excellent care they receive. 'The Bridge' is a rightly valued resource which provides highly personalised and effective support for students with a range of complex needs. Transition arrangements into the school are excellent. Parents commented very favourably on the Year 6 Summer School. The school's work to improve attendance has had a clear impact on raising achievement, and attendance is now above the national average and significantly higher than for schools in similar circumstances.

Teachers use a good range of learning strategies to ensure that students remain engaged in their learning. Positive working relationships between staff and students in most lessons make a significant contribution to students' progress. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly, using their good subject knowledge. Teaching in English and science has improved because the departments are now fully staffed by subject specialists and are well led. Peer and self-assessment is well embedded across the curriculum and, as a result, most students know their levels of attainment and targets. They are less confident in articulating what they need to do to improve. This, in part, is because the quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. Teachers are not all equally successful in planning to meet the needs of the full ability range.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

The headteacher and her senior team have been extremely successful in creating an aspirational culture among staff and students, and 99% of staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire agreed with the statement, 'I am proud to be a member of staff at

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this school'. The school sets highly ambitious targets and, now, successfully meets them. Middle leadership has been strengthened considerably, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. This has helped to drive significant improvements to provision in these key areas since the last inspection. Although leaders and managers have successfully improved the quality of teaching, the pace of improvement has not been as rapid as in other areas and inconsistencies remain.

Procedures for safeguarding students are good and benefit from the significant expertise of the governing body. Governors are able to hold the school to account well and plans are now being developed to strengthen their links with individual departments.

Partnership arrangements are a key strength and are highly successful in promoting students' learning and well-being. Work with outside agencies to support students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable is exemplary. Well-established curricular links with Thames Valley University are now complemented by links with a local school to further enhance the curriculum.

The school works hard to engage with all parents and carers through initiatives such as information evenings for Polish or Nepalese parents, and is becoming increasingly successful in helping parents to play a more active role in students' learning. Strenuous efforts to improve attendance at parents' evenings are now beginning to have an impact. The school has good systems in place for contacting parents, and uses new technologies, such as text messaging, to do so. A number of parents are currently involved in a pilot scheme to improve their access to daily information on their child's progress.

Work to promote community cohesion is based on an acute understanding of the school and local community. Initiatives such as 'Faith Week' and 'Community Cohesion Day' have helped to ensure that the school is an extremely harmonious community. The impact of school strategies is evaluated thoroughly, and the resulting information used well to extend provision further. Promotion of equal opportunities is central to school's ethos, resulting in no notable differences in the performance of different groups of learners. Strategies such as free notebook computers for sixth formers exemplify the school's commitment to tackling potential barriers to learning.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The very large majority of sixth form students make good progress in their learning and personal development. Students taking BTEC and other vocational qualifications make exceptional progress because courses are closely matched to their needs. Achievement for the smaller proportions of students who take AS and A level courses is more varied but satisfactory overall. As a result, the school is reviewing its arrangements to ensure that students are guided onto appropriate curricular pathways. Sixth-form provision now benefits from partnership arrangements with a local school. Opportunities for students to contribute to the wider community are developing but still at the early stages. Students report that they enjoy learning and appreciate the good support they receive from their teachers. Leadership and management arrangements for the sixth form have changed recently and are satisfactory. Monitoring of provision and outcomes for students is not yet sufficiently sharp to ensure that good progress in learning and personal development is maintained for all students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers who completed the Ofsted questionnaires are highly supportive of the school and the quality of education their children receive. Most parents and carers say their children enjoy school and make good progress in their learning. Parents and carers are also highly supportive of the leadership and management of the school. A very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about some aspects of provision, including the school's work to promote healthy lifestyles and its effectiveness in managing unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors investigated these concerns and their judgements are reflected in appropriate sections

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of this report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Prospect School 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 136 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,126 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	29	87	64	5	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	40	29	89	65	6	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	41	30	86	63	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	22	99	73	5	4	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	28	21	98	72	6	4	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	19	92	68	14	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	14	89	65	21	15	0	0
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)	35	26	79	58	5	4	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	19	91	67	8	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	24	76	56	20	15	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	8	85	63	21	15	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	37	27	91	67	0	0	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	32	84	62	6	4	1	1

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



22 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Prospect School, Reading RG30 4EX

Thank you for the warm welcome which you gave to inspectors during our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed observing your work in lessons and listening to your views in meetings and as you talked to us at break and lunchtime. Here is a summary of our main inspection findings, although I hope some of you will read the full inspection report.

- Your school has improved significantly since the last inspection and now provides a good quality of education.
- The curriculum is outstanding and plays a vital role in helping you to get the qualifications you will need when you leave school. The range of courses offered in Key Stage 4 helps ensure that many of you make outstanding progress in your learning.
- You are now doing better in English, mathematics and science and levels of attainment are rising quickly.
- Staff provide excellent care, guidance and support to make sure that all groups of learners receive the right support.
- You get along very well together. Behaviour has improved and is now good, apart from in a very small minority of lessons.

We have asked the staff to improve the school further by:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons are as good as the best
- ensuring that you always understand how you can improve your work.

We have also asked that school leaders provide more opportunities for you to experience leadership roles and that they involve you more in decision making. I hope many of you will seize opportunities to play your part.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector

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