

The Cottesloe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110533
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	337521
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1114
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Collis
Headteacher	Nigel Fox
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2006
School address	Aylesbury Road Leighton Buzzard Bedfordshire LU7 0NY
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 49 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at school improvement planning, school policies, curriculum and teachers' planning, students' work and minutes of the governing body. In addition, nearly 600 parental questionnaires, 187 student questionnaires and 69 staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

- the achievement of students, particularly in English and mathematics
- the effectiveness of teaching, and the use of assessment, in challenging all learners, particularly higher attaining students
- the effectiveness of leaders at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in order to promote improvement.

Information about the school

Cottesloe School is a larger than average rural school. It is a specialist Arts College. Although the majority of students are White British, a small proportion do represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students with a learning difficulty and/or disability is well below average; however, the proportion with a statement of educational needs is closer to average. Few students are eligible for free school meals.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The headteacher, in a considered and focused manner, has created a vision for the school which is shared by a very large majority of staff. He is very ably supported by his deputy headteacher and together they have taken key actions which parents, staff and students all acknowledge have contributed to improvements in the school. Senior leaders are clearly focused on raising the standards students attain and have taken decisive actions to secure the improvements needed. They have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and have been astute in prioritising areas for improvement, for example in teaching and learning. Senior leaders acknowledge that these actions need time to make a consistent difference to the experience of all students. Students are astute in their analysis of their school. Inspection findings are summed up by one student's comment: 'I think the school has improved a lot but still needs to make more improvement.'

Systems to check the quality of the school's work have been strengthened. These include senior leaders holding middle leaders to account more systematically through departmental evaluations, regular monitoring of teaching and learning and close scrutiny of data. However, not all subject leaders are skilled in using a wide range of data to challenge teachers for the inconsistencies in practice which exist. This means that the quality of teaching and the curriculum students experience vary within subjects. Strengthened procedures to secure improvement, combined with a rise in standards, support the school's capacity to improve further.

The teaching students experience and, as a consequence, their learning range from outstanding to a small proportion which is inadequate. In the best lessons seen, students were given opportunities to direct their learning, work collaboratively and make links between different subjects. Where teaching is weaker, teachers are not using data about students' prior learning to plan lessons which challenge all. This means that too often, the highest attaining are undertaking work that is too easy or, in some lessons where there is setting, the lowest attaining students are not given opportunity to acquire new skills. In some lessons, particularly English, excellent examples of checking students' understanding exist but in other subjects, particularly mathematics, teachers are not adept at tailoring students' learning in lessons as a result of good assessment. Consequently, students sometimes struggle with work they do not understand or undertake work that is too easy.

In many lessons, inspectors observed exemplary behaviour, and students move around the school site with care and thought for each other. However, in a small number of lessons, teachers are not skilled in employing effective strategies to ensure students' behaviour is conducive to learning. Cramped lunchtime facilities also give opportunity for

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inconsiderate behaviour on a few students' part.

Support for vulnerable students or those experiencing learning difficulties is of a good quality. This includes courses for students who need help in managing their behaviour better. A strength of these courses is the involvement of parents. Activities such as these have helped to bring about a reduction in the number of exclusions, although the school acknowledges that this needs to be reduced further.

The school's specialism in the arts contributes much to the enjoyment of students. Displays of students' work are of a high quality and links with other schools and organisations in the community enhance the curriculum that students experience. Many teachers are adept at using the school's specialism in order to make their own teaching creative. Examples include visualising and drawing in mathematics or the use of 'freeze frame' drama techniques in English.

Senior leaders have been proactive in finding funds to improve the school facilities, for example, organising a marathon to raise money to resurface the playground or involving parents in repainting classrooms. However, despite the efforts of senior leaders, as was the case at the time of the last inspection, students still do not have access to suitable provision for lunchtime. This is quite rightly a cause for concern for parents and students, and impacts on their ability to eat healthily and in a positive environment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By September 2010, through robust monitoring and evaluation, ensure that the systems senior leaders have implemented to promote improved outcomes for students have a significant impact, particularly on their attainment.
- Ensure that middle leaders use data to challenge teachers on the achievement of their students in order to promote consistency within and between departments.
- Raise standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring students consistently experience high quality teaching and learning through: - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve and by ensuring assessment information is used to plan lessons that challenge all learners, particularly the higher attaining - ensuring teachers are skilled in checking students' understanding within lessons in order to provide teaching that best matches their needs - ensuring all teachers are effective in using behaviour management strategies which promote good behaviour for learning.
- Improve the physical environment in order to promote students' personal development and well-being; in particular, ensure students have access to suitable dining facilities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

In many lessons, good relationships are evident between students and teachers and in over half the lessons observed teaching was good or better. Key features of the most effective lessons were:

- ' energetic, enthusiastic practitioners with good subject knowledge who motivated students to engage with the subject matter ' good questioning by teachers to aid students' understanding, although students were not always probed to build upon each others' answers or extend their own answers ' thoughtful planning of lessons which enable students to work collaboratively and gain knowledge by learning from each other ' good use of assessment to check students' understanding and feedback, which gave them precise areas to improve their work linked to the learning objectives ' attention paid to students with learning difficulties or vulnerable students so they were well integrated in the lesson.

In approximately half the lessons, students' learning was not better than satisfactory. In these lessons, teachers' expectations of what students could do were not high enough. Key weaknesses in these lessons were:

- ' teachers did not always build on students' existing learning so lessons were not matched to students' needs ' teachers did not check sufficiently well how much students understood in order to tailor their teaching ' teachers directed the learning too much so students had little opportunity to demonstrate their understanding '

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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the questions asked of students were low-level and did not challenge them to work to their potential.

Senior leaders have sought to address these issues by implementing strong systems to improve teaching and learning, and more rigorous assessment systems. These include termly progress checks against the target set for students, as well as holding middle leaders to account in regular line manager meetings. Heads of year, in conjunction with senior leaders, review the progress students make and are more readily able to target underachieving students. Students are aware of their targets and increasingly know what they need to do to improve, although this is not embedded in all teachers' practice.

The school's arts specialism is helping to improve learning. It has enhanced the curriculum with additional qualifications such as Advanced Supplementary (AS) level photography and GCSE performing arts. The curriculum has been extended by additional courses after school, giving students more choice and extra provision for the gifted and talented as well as vocational courses at the local college. Weaknesses in the curriculum provision are in the areas of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) where resources and teaching methodologies are not always appropriate. The development of both mathematics and ICT across the curriculum is at an early stage. This means there is not a common understanding and expectation of the skills and knowledge students should have and use in subjects across the school. Registration time is also not always well used to promote students' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

The care, guidance and support provided to students are good. Senior leaders consistently reflect on their practice and thereby improve it. For example, they appreciated that guidance provided to students was not sufficiently tailored to individuals so have since implemented one-to-one sessions with them. Transition arrangements for students joining the school in Year 7 have been very well received by parents and have enabled students to quickly settle into school life. This is further enhanced by the strong partnerships which have been forged extending the arts to local primary schools. Ex-students also return to the school in order to give guidance to students about career choices and the world after school.

New systems to support at-risk students are having a positive impact. For example, a tailored programme for students with behaviour issues, which involves parents, has resulted in improvements which these students articulate themselves and has reduced exclusions. The school counsellor is a valuable resource and provides good support for students when they need it.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The relatively recently formed senior leadership team has taken strategic actions which have contributed to improvements in key areas, such as behaviour and teaching and learning. The impact of these actions, although not fully secure, is recognised by students and parents alike and is contributing to improved standards.

Systems to monitor the work of the school are increasingly robust and rigorous. These include training for middle leaders in order to ensure consistency in practice and regular line management meetings. This is helping to raise expectations of all staff and ensuring the ambitions of the headteacher and his deputy are clearly communicated across the school. A strong focus on improving teaching is evident through the many opportunities created for staff. This includes regular after-school professional development sessions, the in-house production of a teaching and learning newsletter, a teaching and learning working party with representatives from all subjects and the opportunity for staff to be involved in accredited action research projects. The result of these activities is seen directly in improved classroom practice, where teachers are able to apply their learning following training.

Senior leaders have an accurate picture of what constitutes effective classroom practice for teachers. However, collaboration between support and teaching staff in order to improve students' learning is not always well planned. There is a strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for all students and increasingly effective actions are taken, particularly to support those with learning difficulties or those at risk of disaffection. However, as inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching, the impact on educational outcomes for all students is yet to be fully realised.

At the time of the inspection, safeguarding procedures were satisfactory and government guidelines were followed.

Parents are increasingly involved in the life of the school as a result of new systems to keep parents informed. These include letters posted home, use of email and drop-in evenings. Attendance at parents' evening has increased significantly and is high. Senior leaders recognise that this in itself created difficulties for parents in not being able to spend much time with teachers and have considered how to improve this. Senior leaders regularly use information they have gained from parental feedback to inform their priorities. The school has set up working parties which involve parents, such as for homework and study skills and have run information evenings for parents.

Students of different backgrounds integrate well within the school community and staff have made good links with local schools. However, a strategic programme is not yet in place to develop students' awareness of, and interaction with, groups not widely represented within the school community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students are well motivated and enjoy their studies; retention rates to courses are high. Students value the collective opportunity to engage in enrichment activities which have been extended to include sports, and are actively involved in their school community.

Overall, students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress relative to their prior attainment. As is the case in the main school, teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. However, they do not always develop independent learning skills quickly enough. In a minority of lessons, higher attaining students are not sufficiently challenged.

A coherent system to track students' progress has been introduced which includes regular meetings between individual students and key staff. This appears to be a robust method to track progress and provide pertinent support: however, it is too early to judge its impact.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

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

A high proportion of parents responded to the parental questionnaire. The majority are positive about the work of the school, in particular the recent improvements. Parents value the support provided by the school for students with learning difficulties, or those who may have experienced bullying. They note it is dealt with effectively. A high proportion of parents noted their concern about the impact of the poor lunchtime facilities on students' development of healthy lifestyles; inspection evidence concurs with this. A small proportion raised concerns about the quality of teaching experienced by some students. A few raised concerns about how well the school communicated with them. Inspectors investigated these concerns and found that programmes to involve parents in the life of the school, as well as systems to act on the views of parents were wide-ranging and regularly evaluated in order to improve further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cottesloe 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 12 statements about the school. The inspection team received 575 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1114 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	167	30	344	60	44	8	7	2
The school keeps my child safe	147	26	387	71	16	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	113	20	325	57	50	9	7	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	106	19	313	55	55	10	8	2
The teaching is good at this school	104	19	329	58	66	12	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	75	13	334	59	76	14	7	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	10	315	55	118	21	11	2
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)	91	16	321	56	51	9	9	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	17	356	62	49	9	7	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	115	20	291	51	70	13	13	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	80	14	292	51	69	12	11	2
The school is led and managed effectively	135	24	319	56	39	7	5	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	175	31	306	53	39	7	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 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.



18 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cottesloe School, Leighton Buzzard LU7 0NY

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us. We valued the discussions we had with you and I would like to take this opportunity to share our findings with you.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory quality of education. Both you and your parents told us that the school is improving. Strong aspects of the school's work are the good care and support provided to you. The majority of you told us you feel safe and know who to turn to for help. Some of the teaching you experience is good; however, in other lessons, you are not always challenged enough to reach your full potential. In many lessons, your behaviour is excellent; however, on occasions, this standard falls and hinders your learning.

Your progress in some lessons is good but overall, it is only satisfactory. Your headteacher and senior leaders are fully aware of this and are taking the right actions to improve further. We have asked them to do the following:

- ' ensure teachers responsible for particular areas promote consistently good practice ' raise standards by ensuring all the teaching you experience is as good as the best in the school ' improve your physical environment, particularly in ensuring you have appropriate lunchtime facilities.

You can help by making sure your behaviour is always enabling you to learn and that you provide feedback to the school about what has improved and what needs further improvement. I wish you and your school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector

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