

Belper School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112989
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	338069
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Davis

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1478
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Birkinshaw
Headteacher	Trevor Harding
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
School address	John O'Gaunt's Way off Kilbourne Road Belper
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six 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 policies and development planning, the analysis of examination results and data related to the tracking of students' progress, senior leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning, safeguarding documents, governors' minutes, students' work and 270 questionnaires from parents and carers, together with those from students and staff.

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

- how well students are currently making progress, and the strategies that have been used to address the recent fall in achievement and their impact
- the accuracy and effectiveness of the school's tracking systems
- the impact of the school's specialism across the school and the wider community
- the effectiveness of leadership in evaluating the schools' strengths and areas for improvement and its capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

Belper School and Sixth Form Centre is a larger than average, predominantly White British school community, housed in buildings that have recently been partially rebuilt in response to growing student numbers. These include extensive facilities for the delivery of art and catering. A new modern foreign languages block is about to be opened; this faculty currently being housed in huts. There are very few looked after children or students for whom English is an additional language. Around 10% of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is well below the national average. The school was designated as a specialist technology college in 1994. It has achieved Healthy Schools status and the Artsmark Gold award.

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

Belper School has a distinctive ethos which stresses positive relationships between students, staff and parents as the key basis for learning and personal development. Students wear no formal uniform and use the first names of teachers, resulting in an informal atmosphere around the school, but one where the students feel well supported by adults. 'It is what gives our school a unique flavour and enables us to view our teachers as equals', one student said. Despite the large numbers, the school feels calm, and behaviour around the school and in classrooms is good. Students are very keen to learn and they listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. The technology specialism has resulted in an impressive working environment, particularly the art area, featuring inspiring students' work.

Although the proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes has showed a rising trend, attainment in English and mathematics declined up to 2008 when students' progress was well below the national average. Appropriate actions taken by the senior leadership including focusing on a group of boys identified as underachieving, has resulted in much improved attainment and progress being seen in 2009. Progress tracking indicates that current students are on target to continue this pattern of improvement.

Students enjoy school and attend well. They feel safe and well cared for as a result of the strong relationships they build with their form tutors and year heads who follow them through the school. The excellent pastoral care of vulnerable students and those with special educational needs enables these students to develop independence. For example, students with Asperger's syndrome and deaf students have formed their own self-help groups enabling them to raise awareness of their condition amongst their peers.

The schools' technology specialism is reflected in the wide variety of courses on offer. Alternative provision has ensured that students who might otherwise have dropped out of education are being included and the proportion of students who do not go on to education, employment or training (NEETs) is low. Although the curriculum is flexible to meet students' individual needs and interests, sometimes these needs are not met in lessons where teachers fail to plan to provide sufficient challenge for the most able students or support for the least able. This is particularly noticeable in mixed-ability English classes. Students are excited by some of the activities they undertake but they do not always understand what they are meant be learning as it is not made clear by their teachers. Some outstanding teaching and use of assessment to support learning were seen during the inspection, but this expertise is not being shared sufficiently. A lack of a whole-school approach to teaching and learning has resulted in inconsistency

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of practice and quality. In too many lessons, there is little use of assessment information to support learning and to raise attainment. As a result, in some lessons, students do not know what is required for a high level answer or know sufficiently how to improve and develop their work. Questioning techniques sometimes fail to challenge students sufficiently. Students are well supported and guided as they go through the school and students value the careers guidance they receive throughout their schooling.

The senior leadership team, well supported by the governing body, work hard to ensure that students are well cared for and that vulnerable students receive the nurture they require to enable them to learn and develop. However, at all levels of leadership, weaknesses in the systems for monitoring and evaluating performance have resulted in variations in the quality of teaching. Recently introduced methods of tracking the progress of individual and groups of students, now provide robust information, enabling underachievement to be identified early enough to be effectively addressed. The impact of this can be seen in the improved attainment and progress in 2009. In turn, this illustrates the school's capacity for continued improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - using accurate assessment data to plan work that meets the needs of students of different abilities
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning of students in class is always sufficiently detailed to draw out extended responses, especially from more able students
 - ensuring that students of all abilities know what they should be learning
 - giving students clear guidance through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work.
- Ensuring that students know how they will be assessed so that they can take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning by all levels of management to ensure a consistent whole-school approach to raising levels of progress.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join the school having reached slightly above average results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science in their previous schools. By the end of Key Stage 3 in 2009, teacher assessments indicate that standards in mathematics and science remain above average, with students making satisfactory progress. However, standards in English are average. The school's assessment data and evidence gained from lesson observations during the inspection indicate that students are failing to meet their challenging targets in this subject and progress is slow. At Key Stage 4, in 2009,

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standards were broadly average. The percentage of students gaining five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics showed an increase on the 2008 results so that they were close to the above average standards attained in 2007. However other attainment indicators over the last three years show considerable variance. Lesson observations in Key Stage 4 showed attainment to be average overall and current progress satisfactory.

Students value their school. Their positive attitudes are clearly seen in their enthusiastic contributions to the school and local community. The school council are proud of the contribution they make, for example in significantly improving the toilet facilities, and they spoke enthusiastically about taking responsibility for fundraising for a charity of their own choice. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good so that students from all backgrounds get on well with each other and respect each other's views. Students said how interesting and uplifting they find assemblies when visiting speakers explain their personal beliefs. Students express some concern about the level of bullying but say that incidents are dealt with effectively by the school and that there is always an adult to turn to if they have a problem. They say that personal, social and health education lessons inform them well of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. There is a good take-up for the wide variety of sporting activities available, including the Duke of Edinburgh's award which further enhances their community involvement. Students' key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, together with the work and enterprise activities they experience and their confidence in working with adults, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

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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<p>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</p> <p>Taking into account: Pupils' attendance¹</p>	<p>2</p> <hr/> <p>2</p>
<p>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</p>	<p>2</p>

How effective is the provision?

Students actively participate in lessons. They are confident to question and challenge their teachers and, in the best lessons, work as a team towards a common aim. For example, in an outstanding drama lesson, all students took responsibility for improving and developing their performance, knowing that their contribution was vital to the overall outcome. In some English lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3, teachers were more focused on lesson activities rather than the progressive development of skills and understanding required to prepare the students for future examination courses. The quality of lesson planning across subjects is inconsistent and sometimes superficial. The best practice uses assessment data to plan tasks and a variety of resources to meet the needs of individuals and groups and to ensure that learning is evaluated at the end of the lesson. Although students value the oral feedback they receive on their work, marking is often superficial, failing to indicate the grade or level achieved and how to improve.

The school provides an increasingly diverse curriculum. In Key Stage 3, it is enhanced by the provision of drama and three modern foreign languages (MFL). Current weakness in the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 8 has been addressed for next year. The time allocation for physical education in Year 9 is less than recommended because of restricted access to the leisure centre. A wide range of sporting activities after school is provided to compensate for this shortfall. The broad provision in Key Stage 4 draws on good partnerships with local colleges and schools. A wide variety of academic and vocational courses are offered, including MFL for nearly all students. Courses in catering are popular and here students enjoy wearing appropriate professional uniform. The curriculum is enriched by an extensive variety of activities and trips. The summer enrichment week includes residential opportunities in this country and abroad.

The dedicated staff responsible for care guidance and support know the students well. Close links with outside agencies ensure a high level of care. Transition arrangements are robust and vulnerable students are well cared for as they move between key stages. A nurture group in Year 7 promotes the social and emotional skills of the most vulnerable. Assessment data is increasingly being used by year heads and form tutors to provide academic support, although some staff are less confident in using this.

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	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his team have taken effective action to address the recent fall in student progress. The school places a high priority on the promotion of equality of opportunity and has succeeded in closing the gap in performance between boys and girls. This is now only evident in English. School leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and, as a result, their improvement plan identifies appropriate priorities to enable sustained development. The school's policy of sharing responsibility for the monitoring of teaching and learning has led to an inconsistent range of different monitoring activities which, at times, lack rigour. The governing body is well organised into a broad range of committees and know the school well. However, some are not sufficiently familiar with all the key data relating to progress to enable them to be systematically involved in evaluating the school's performance. The school works closely with parents, particularly with those of vulnerable students, and regularly seeks their views. Strong partnerships with local business, extended services and specialist college partnerships enhance the curriculum provision and the personal development and care of students. The school community is cohesive and operates well with the local community but not enough is done to reach out to those beyond the locality to enable students to gain more understanding of life in today's multicultural society. The schools' planning and evaluation of community cohesion is currently insufficiently formalised. Safeguarding procedures are robust and child protection procedures well organised.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

Sixth form attainment is broadly average, with students making satisfactory progress. AS results indicate better progress than at A level, where students are completing an above average number of courses which appears to have a negative impact on their overall progress. Students value the opportunity to participate in community service. Work experience placements for those on vocational courses greatly enhance their personal development and progress.

Much sixth form teaching is good or better. Students learn best when lessons are well planned and students understand, before starting a task, how they will be assessed and are encouraged to aim for the highest level of challenge. The curriculum offers a wide range of courses at various levels, incorporating academic and vocational opportunities. Students value the excellent support and advice in preparing for university. Many, however, say that they would like more advice on other pathways on completion of their courses and there are currently few opportunities for students to access external accreditation and experience links with business and industry.

The new head of sixth form has begun to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision. Already, improvements have been made to the tracking and monitoring of students' progress and the tutorial programme, developing the role of form tutors. Although these changes are too recent to show through fully in terms of impact, students feel well informed about their targets and how to reach them.

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

A minority of parents responded to the questionnaire. Most of these parents indicated that they were happy with the way the school provides for their children's well-being and their learning and progress. Parents who made comments regarding the quality of teaching, expressed opposing views about the quality of teaching and some were

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concerned about individual subjects or teachers. Inspectors agreed with the concerns expressed. Several parents expressed concerns about the way behaviour is managed, the lack of uniform and informal dress of students and staff and the inappropriate use of first names. Inspectors agreed that this can give a first impression of being too informal, but found that it did not affect the relationships between teachers and students or their attitudes to learning. A very small minority say that communications with the school are sometimes difficult and that the school is slow to respond to their concerns. Other inspection evidence indicates that communication and partnership with parents are good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Belper School and Sixth Form Centre 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 270 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1478 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	88	33	164	61	15	6	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	54	20	201	74	8	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	21	190	70	16	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	73	27	167	62	20	6	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	43	16	195	72	18	7	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	11	185	69	39	14	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	9	194	72	35	13	2	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)	52	19	175	65	18	7	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	48	18	187	69	26	10	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	14	155	66	28	10	7	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	9	177	66	28	10	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	40	15	185	69	12	4	11	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	70	42	70	42	20	12	20	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.



3 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Belper School and Sixth Form Centre, Belper, DE56 1RZ

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your school. We were particularly impressed by your mature comments and your evident pride in your school. We think that it provides a satisfactory quality of education, and these are our main findings.

- attainment by the end of Year 11 is average but improving. You enjoy your learning and are making satisfactory progress.
- you value the relationships you have with your teachers and each other and the harmonious school community where everyone is respected. Your behaviour in lessons is good and most of you attend well.
- teaching is satisfactory. You are keen to learn and contribute well in lessons, but we think some teachers need to be clearer about what they want you to learn and to inform you how you will be assessed, so that you can take more responsibility for your own learning. Some teachers do not challenge or support you according to your individual ability.
- the curriculum is good, enabling you to follow courses that match your interests and abilities, and it is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits. You particularly value the facilities in technology, art and catering.
- the excellent care you receive enables you to feel safe and well supported. Your teachers know you well and care about you as individuals.
- the school's leaders are working to ensure you are well cared for and that things continue to improve.

In order to take your learning to new heights, we have asked the school to ensure that teaching is consistently good, by planning lessons that meet your individual needs and making sure that they make it clear what you will be learning during each lesson. We have also asked them to ensure that assessment and marking are used more effectively so that you know how to develop your work. We have also asked that when school leaders visit your lessons, they all look particularly at the progress you are making in your learning. You can help by always working hard to achieve your targets.

Yours sincerely

Mary Davis

Lead inspector

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