

The Cavendish School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117528
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339025
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Ruth Westbrook

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
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	1195
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline Nunn
Headteacher	Dr Stephen Pam
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2007
School address	Warners End Road Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's annual and strategic plans, key policy documents, assessment information and students' work. In addition, 180 parent questionnaires were received and analysed along with questionnaires from staff and students.

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

- whether expectations of students' progress are high enough and whether there are differences in the rates of progress across key stages and subjects and between different groups of students
- how well teaching is planned to meet the different needs of students in the class
- how clearly students understand how to improve their work and how to make good progress
- how effectively the school leaders check on the quality of provision.

Information about the school

This specialist sports college is larger than average. Students are of predominantly White British heritage. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is lower than average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school has a unit for a few students who are visually impaired. The sixth form is part of the West Dacorum Partnership for Learning. The school was awarded Investors in People Standard in 2008 and has a Sportsmark.

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

This is a satisfactory school which has improved steadily since its last inspection. The school has increased the proportion of students achieving GCSE Grade C or better in English and mathematics, and this is now average. Some aspects of the school's work that were judged satisfactory at the last inspection are now good, most notably the quality of care, guidance and support. The inspection identified a number of key strengths in the school's work which are:

the impact of the school's specialism as a sports college in broadening the range of extra-curricular opportunities for students and contributing to good healthy lifestyles

the pastoral care for students which helps them to feel safe and well looked after

the tracking of progress of students in the sixth form and main school every nine weeks which gives them and their parents regular updates on the progress they are making

the positive relationships which are formed between members of the school community promoting a welcoming environment

the support for students who are visually impaired and other students with a special educational need that helps them to access the same curriculum as other students

the good support for vulnerable students and their parents

The school's leadership are committed to implementing further plans to raise attainment and accelerate students' progress from satisfactory to good. The school has identified key strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and students' learning, but school leaders recognise that more work is needed to ensure the spread of good practice and speed up the pace of change. The improvements achieved so far indicate that the school has satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement. However, the school's monitoring and evaluation of its work has not been sufficiently sharp to enable the precise identification of where improvement is needed to raise standards. The effective implementation of plans for improvement has been variable across curriculum areas. Consequently, the quality of teaching is inconsistent so activities and resources are not always planned to match the different abilities of individuals and groups of students or to engage them actively in their learning. Although students know their target grades and where they are currently, the quality of guidance given on the steps needed to reach the target is variable particularly, the amount and quality of written feedback.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen monitoring and evaluation in order to identify precise priorities that are related to improving learning and the progress of different groups of students.

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Ensure that agreed procedures and strategies are implemented by teachers across all key stages and curriculum areas.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students of different abilities are routinely challenged and supported by a range of interesting activities and resources so that standards rise.
- Ensure that students have regular written guidance, on their progress towards their targets and the next steps to take to reach them.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enter the school having achieved standards that are broadly average although a small minority have weak literacy and numeracy skills. By the time they leave the school at the end of Year 11, their attainment is in line with expectations, indicating satisfactory progress. There has been an increase each year since the last inspection in the number of students reaching five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics. In unvalidated results for 2009 the percentage was 44%. There is variation between the attainment of students in different subjects. In physical education, students have consistently reached standards which are above average. In mathematics and English standards have risen and are now average but in history, geography and modern foreign languages they are below average. In Key Stage 3 progress is slower than in Key Stage 4. The school has introduced a number of initiatives to improve rates of progress from Years 7 to 9. For example, the school identified a need to address the students' weaker literacy skills on entry and last year made innovative changes through the Access course in Year 7. Early indications are that this has successfully raised attainment and improved the attitudes and enjoyment of the students involved.

The quality of students' learning in lessons is only satisfactory overall because the quality of teaching is uneven. When actively involved in their work, students show high levels of interest and enthusiasm and make accelerated progress. Some students say that lessons can be boring when teachers talk for too long or they do not have activities to do for themselves. In these lessons, the quality of learning decreases and a few students lose focus and can misbehave. Good examples were seen during the inspection of able students being challenged to extend their thinking. Year 10 English students were encouraged and shown how to aim for A* grades in their writing on Romeo and Juliet. However, in too many lessons, the most able students do not receive enough challenge to extend their learning so their progress is only satisfactory. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also satisfactory. Their particular needs are well defined and there is effective support in place to support these needs. However, the planning of activities and resources in lessons does not always take sufficient account of these individual needs so rates of progress are slower.

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Most students say they feel safe in school. They have a good understanding of how to behave well. This was observed when large numbers of students move carefully through narrow doorways and staircases at the change of lessons. Students feel there is an adult they can turn to for help. A large proportion of students take up a sports related activity within school. Students show a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle, and most demonstrate this in their choices of food and drink at break. Behaviour has continued to improve since the last inspection as a result of the introduction of a number of increasingly effective strategies. In lessons, it is usually at least satisfactory, and there are fewer instances of disruptive behaviour. In social spaces, students respond well to adult supervision and most exercise appropriate self-discipline. Some students from all years have a range of responsibilities in school which help them to make a satisfactory contribution to their community, but the numbers involved are small in Key Stage 3. A large number of older students train as sports leaders and gain a good sense of community responsibility through coaching younger students in school and in primary schools. A litter collection project has enabled a few students to make a contribution to the local community but these contacts are limited. Students work well together and cooperatively. There is a pleasant atmosphere at break times. Students show understanding and acceptance of rules and school systems. Their cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory although students respond well to the limited opportunities available to promote these aspects. Students' preparation for their future working lives is satisfactory because they are developing an appropriate range of basic and interpersonal skills and attendance is average.

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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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 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?

The quality of teaching is not consistent across subjects, years and ability groups. The inspection's findings agree with the school's own evaluation that too much teaching is satisfactory. There is strength across the school in teachers' subject knowledge. In the majority of lessons, teachers and students have good working relationships. Most students are aware of their target grades and their current attainment across all subjects. In several lessons students have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. Elsewhere, students are vague or unaware of their next steps towards their targets. During the inspection some exemplary practice was seen in written feedback and guidance to students. However there are still inconsistencies within and across subjects which means that the feedback for some students is superficial and not helpful. Where good and outstanding teaching is seen, there is a careful match between the work and abilities of different groups within the class. In those lessons where teaching is satisfactory, the match of work to students' attainment is not sharp enough, and does not take account of the different abilities within the class.

The satisfactory curriculum provides many well-planned opportunities that enable students to develop a good awareness of a healthy lifestyle and personal safety. There are fewer occasions when the curriculum contributes to the development of students' spiritual and cultural development and their understanding of the communities to which they belong. The school's sports specialism has had a positive effect across a number of subjects with joint projects in mathematics, English and science. This has contributed to improved attainment in these subjects. The extensive extra-curricular sports provision and student participation rates are excellent. The school is developing different routes for students of different abilities at all stages. This has had the greatest influence to date on those lower attaining students who benefit from extended work experience and college courses. The school is implementing plans to improve the match of courses to meet the needs of students of middle ability.

The effective support for students through the pastoral system is based on good relationships between tutors and their groups. This includes efficient, regular tracking of academic progress. A number of strategies are in place to support students who are identified as not on target. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support from the learning support department. Their needs are clearly identified and teaching assistants give valuable support. The few students who are at an early stage of learning English receive good initial language teaching and comment on settling quickly into the school. High-quality adaptations are in place for the school's visually impaired students which enable them to participate fully alongside other

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students. There is thorough liaison with primary schools before students transfer in Year 7 ensuring that appropriate information is passed on. The wide range of guidance available for students and parents at different stages ensures smooth transfer between key stages and on to further or higher education. The school has introduced a range of strategies and systems to improve behaviour and attendance. Both these aspects of students' well being are improving. The number of students frequently absent from school has fallen considerably and the number of permanent exclusions has declined. The school places some students, who are at risk of becoming disaffected, on courses which are more appropriately meeting their needs. The majority complete these successfully and go on to positive destinations elsewhere.

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other leaders are effective in sharing their commitment to improving the school and raising attainment. There is a clear vision for the future and there are adequate plans in place to raise attainment. The school has improved since the last inspection but in some areas this improvement has been slow such as in improving the consistency of the quality of teaching. The school's processes for monitoring and evaluating are satisfactory. Performance is monitored regularly and there are good systems for collecting information to support this. The quality of response to this evaluation, however, varies and is dependent on the skills and expertise of curriculum leaders and the strength of their link with senior leadership. The school has taken action to focus all leaders on raising standards but the impact of this has not yet been fully realised with consistency in the classroom. In evaluating the quality of teaching the school has relied heavily on lesson observation and not given sufficient weighting to evaluating learning through a broader range of evidence including student performance information and the performance of groups. This largely explains why actions have not resulted in uniformity in the quality of teaching. The school has looked carefully at the progress of boys and girls across the school. It is beginning to monitor the progress of other groups of students so that equality of opportunity can be ensured. The school's specialism and extended schools involvement has helped to develop stronger partnerships with the school's community. Broader links beyond sport are more limited as yet. The school has begun to look at ways of developing more community and parental involvement. The school's role in promoting community cohesion is satisfactory;

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although a few projects exist which contribute, there is not an established network of national and international links.

Governors have a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Statutory and financial responsibilities are well-discharged. The school works hard to safeguard students including those most at risk. Safeguarding regulations and duties are met and in line with government requirements. They are regularly reviewed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
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

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. It has shown a number of improvements since the last inspection, including students' attainment which is broadly average. Students make sound progress from their different starting points. Although outcomes are satisfactory overall, the students' contribution to the community is good. Students act as sports ambassadors, have leadership roles in the school and raise considerable sums of money for charity. The quality of teaching is variable with pockets of good and outstanding practice, but overall it is satisfactory. Support for specific groups of students, especially the gifted and talented is at an early stage of development. In many sixth form lessons seen, the planning did not take into account the different needs and abilities of the students. Monitoring of students' progress, tracking and reporting are good, and, in the opinion of students, add significantly to their attainment. Students are set challenging targets as a result and this further supports their progress. Since the last inspection, the numbers of students successfully completing their courses has increased as has the number going on to higher education courses. The school's partnership with the local consortium of 16+ providers is an

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integral and effective part of its provision, increasing the options available and the vision and opportunities of students. Its further development is on-going. Leadership and management are satisfactory and have strengthened since the last inspection. There have been a number of effective new initiatives such as the development of more rigorous tracking of progress across the consortium.

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

Most parents who responded to the questionnaire are positive about the quality of the school's provision, particularly the quality of care and support which students receive. Almost all parents feel their children are safe at school. Of greatest concern, to a small minority of parents is the way that the school deals with unacceptable behaviour including bullying. Leaders of the school are mindful of this and have introduced a number of strategies which are effectively tackling poor behaviour. Other particular concerns raised by parents are reflected in the findings of the inspection and areas for improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Cavendish 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 180 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1195 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	17	140	78	7	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	46	26	117	65	7	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	63	35	109	61	7	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	46	26	117	65	16	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	7	4	140	78	30	17	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	17	117	65	30	17	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	9	117	65	46	26	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)	23	13	149	83	7	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	13	133	74	23	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	9	109	61	46	26	7	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	9	102	57	46	26	16	9
The school is led and managed effectively	23	13	117	65	39	22	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	17	117	65	23	13	7	4

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.



12 October 2009

Dear Students,

Inspection of The Cavendish School, Hemel Hempstead HP1 3DW

Thank you for the help you provided when we visited your school recently. We received a warm welcome and your comments and questionnaires were very helpful to us. The quality of the education provided throughout the school and the sixth form is satisfactory, and it has improved since the school's last inspection.

You make satisfactory progress in your learning, reaching average standards by the time you leave school. Your attendance is normal but the number who are frequently absent from school has reduced. You understand how to lead healthy and safe lives and most of you say you feel safe in school and that there are people to help you if needed. You make full use of the opportunities which being a sports college bring and this has a good effect on your personal development. Although many of you do things for others in school and locally we think that more of you could get involved and make a contribution to your community. Your headteacher and his staff look after you well and give you good support and help at different stages of your school life.

You told us how you enjoy lessons when there are activities which engage you. We saw how the quality of your learning increased when this was the case. You work better when there is a careful match between your ability level and the work you are asked to do. We have requested teachers to make sure that your work is as interesting as possible and includes enough challenge and support depending on your needs. You told us that you are clear on your target grades and current levels but that you do not always know from the feedback you get what steps you need to take next. Your teachers have been asked to make sure that you get this written guidance more regularly and consistently so that you know how to improve. We have also asked your school's leaders to check carefully how these improvements are implemented so that you experience a greater consistency across different lessons and your attainment levels improve.

We hope that you will do your bit to help the school improve even further by striving to do your very best in your work and by helping your headteacher and staff put these improvements in place.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Westbrook

Lead Inspector

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