

Cotham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109289
Local Authority	City of Bristol
Inspection number	363745
Inspection dates	14–15 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney

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	1320
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nancy Copplestone
Headteacher	Dr Malcolm Willis
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 33 lessons, observed 32 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 113 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, and those completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

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

- The effectiveness of provision to meet the needs of all groups of students, including minority ethnic groups, and to support them to achieve and develop personally.
- The involvement of leaders at all levels in improving provision, and the accuracy of their evaluation of what remains to be done.
- How well the collaborative provision in the sixth form meets the needs of all learners and helps them achieve the best possible overall outcomes.

Information about the school

The school is a specialist performing arts college and, as a high performing specialist school, was awarded a second specialism in mathematics and computing in 2009. The school has a range of awards, including Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools Plus and the Investor in People Profile Award at silver level. Cotham is larger than the average urban school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is above the national average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. Both of these indicators have increased over the last three years. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs has grown considerably since the school was last inspected. Their needs include specific learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is federated with the post-16 centre known as Redland Green 16-19, which is situated at the nearby Redland Green School site. The work of the federation is overseen by a governing committee, which is chaired by the Chair of the Governing Body of Cotham School. Most lessons for Cotham students take place at the school but students have the opportunity to study courses at the post-16 centre. This inspection was coordinated with the inspections of Redland Green School and Redland Green 16-19. At the time of the inspection, extensive building work on a new school was taking place on the site.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Cotham is an outstanding school which, under the dynamic leadership of its headteacher, has developed a culture where learning is valued and aspirations are high. Students show a high level of ambition and reflect well on their learning. They value the quality of the teaching and the support they are given by all staff, and know exactly what they need to do to improve. Consequently, examination results have improved year on year and students' achievement is outstanding. The school has concentrated its efforts well on ensuring that all groups of students, but particularly those from minority ethnic groups, achieve as well as they can. It has had considerable success in this area, and all groups are now making progress that is at least good. The school fosters an atmosphere of inclusion and support and the overwhelming majority of the outcomes that relate to broader personal development are also outstanding. Students behave well and have responded sensibly to the challenges that the building works have brought to the school. The school's specialism has had a key role to play in students' personal development. As one parent wrote, 'The performing arts status gives great opportunities for the students to develop confidence and team-building skills.'

The school's curriculum is outstanding. It provides an excellent balance between breadth of subject coverage and opportunities to develop skills in different contexts. The personalisation of the curriculum plays a significant role in retaining students who might otherwise be excluded from education. Students receive excellent care, guidance and support. Parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that transition into the school was particularly well managed. The inspection team saw much evidence for this in Year 7 lessons, where teachers had made expectations very clear and students were already showing confidence and enthusiasm, often in brand new subjects.

Teaching and learning are good overall and about one fifth of the lessons observed were outstanding. Astute monitoring of teaching and a well-developed professional development programme have enabled the school to focus on the development of teaching, and particularly on the impact of teaching on how students learn. The senior leaders have an accurate and in-depth picture of the quality of teaching and learning. Occasionally, written feedback on lessons does not tell teachers specifically enough what they need to do to improve their practice. This, coupled with a lack of fine-tuning in planning for group work in lessons ? especially for the less able students ? and limited sharing of teaching practice between subject departments, is holding back teaching from rising to the next level.

The school's systems for monitoring students' progress and for identifying where extra support is needed are first rate. The senior leaders have a very keen awareness of the impact of these interventions and make exceptional use of data, both to identify areas of

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need and as a support for setting aspirational targets. The senior and middle leaders have a very clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of provision and plan very well for improvement. The governing body is very committed and well informed, and has played a key role in supporting the school as it promotes links with parents and carers and the wider community.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - fine-tuning the planning of group work so that students of all abilities are fully challenged at all times
 - ensuring that all written feedback on teaching observations gives precise areas for improvement that are reviewed regularly
 - sharing best practice more systematically, particularly across subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students apply themselves well in lessons and students of all ages and abilities show maturity when working independently or in groups. They listen very well to their peers and enjoy learning from them. Students can talk well about what they are learning, as well as what they are doing, and even the youngest students reflect well on how skills learned in one context can be used in another. Many of the lessons observed were only the second, or in some cases the first, in the year and this constrained the opportunities for students to demonstrate a level of progress which was commensurate with their very positive attitudes to learning. Nevertheless, students were clearly making at least good progress in the large majority of lessons.

Attainment is high and has been secure so for the last three years. Unvalidated data on examination results in 2010 indicate that attainment rose even further to a record high for the school. A rigorous analysis of the attainment of some minority ethnic students in 2009 led to targeted intervention and a rise in attainment in 2010. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment, and valued added data indicate that they have made outstanding progress over the last three years by the time they have left Year 11. The school's own reliable and accurate analysis, confirmed by a scrutiny of students' work, shows that current Year 11 students are on track to exceed the very challenging targets set by the school. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported. They are encouraged to work independently, acquire relevant skills and develop their understanding well, but occasionally group work does not cater for their needs quite as well as for other groups of students.

Students report that they feel very safe at the school and have every confidence that any issues that may arise will be swiftly addressed. They have a very clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and their participation rates in sporting and active performing arts activities are high. The students make a very significant contribution to the school and local community through peer mentoring,

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charity work and curriculum outreach in primary schools. Students show tolerance of cultures other than their own and there is a high level of harmony in this diverse school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Both staff and students told inspectors that a real strength of the school was the fact that students were known so well by those who teach and care for them, which is particularly praiseworthy in a school of this size. The management structure of the school ensures that tutors, learning coordinators and senior leaders have a coherent approach towards the support and development of students which does not separate personal well-being from academic progress. Very good liaison with external agencies supports the school's work, particularly with its most vulnerable students. Students receive excellent transition guidance for the next stage of their life.

The school has been adept at developing the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 in a way that develops students' skills but still maintains a good level of academic rigour through subject teaching. The curriculum has also been planned in such a way as to allow for the timetable to be suspended for extended cross-curricular work. A good example of

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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this is the collaborative work in mathematics and science which focuses on the enhancement of numeracy skills. The breadth of the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is extensive and there is flexibility to allow for well-targeted personalisation. All students study a modern language and the success rate of passes at A* to C at GCSE is significantly above the national average. The academic curriculum is balanced very well by the programme of work-related learning, and 'twilight' sessions allow the core academic curriculum to be extended. The taught curriculum is enhanced by a very wide range of well-supported extra-curricular activities.

Students spoke positively about teaching and how the teachers 'pushed' them to do well. Teachers manage their classes well and use good relationships effectively to support a range of learning styles. They have responded well to the point for improvement in the previous inspection and there is now a good focus on students developing independence in their learning. The outstanding lessons seen were characterised by planned activities and teaching that were matched very closely to the needs of all groups, and by challenge and inspiration which drove students to make the best possible progress. Not all lessons are so tightly planned in terms of group work, and the progress made by less able students is sometimes constrained as a result. There is some outstanding teaching and learning across a range of different subjects, but teaching is consistently strong in the arts.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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 manner in which the headteacher has established and shared his vision with all staff and students is outstanding. He is very ably supported by the other members of the senior leadership team, and between them they ensure that all teachers are held accountable for the achievement of their students. The work of the school is monitored extremely well and the annual year group performance reviews are rigorous and comprehensive analyses of a vast range of data relating to student outcomes and the provision for each year group. They also pull together precise strategies for improvement.

The governing body is very effective. The level of its engagement with the life of the school and its execution of statutory responsibilities are particularly impressive. It provides robust challenge in all areas of the school's work. Governors have been keen and active partners in the development of the new school building. The extensive

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engagement with parents and the high level of partnership with other educational institutions, external support agencies and the local community are central to the way the school has developed as an inclusive unit. Links with the charitable Junior Windsor Fellowship and attendance at Saturday supplementary schools in Bristol support students from minority ethnic groups to succeed academically. School staff use technology particularly well to maintain close and regular links with parents, and the parent support groups are a very effective vehicle for parental engagement in school and as decision-making bodies. The school's own evaluative data from parental surveys indicate that a very large majority of parents and carers feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions if they have any problems.

The school has engaged well with the development of community cohesion, particularly at local and international levels. There are good procedures in place to ensure the safety of students in the school's care.

Equality of opportunity and an equal right to success are at the heart of the school's success. The school promotes the rights of all very well, both through its provision and by the way it ensures the rigorous promotion of achievement for all students, despite the minor inconsistencies in planning for groups in lessons.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. There has been high attainment at advanced level, with improving results in 2009 and 2010. There is no significant variation in performance between the great majority of subjects. In 2009, the

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progress made between the end of Year 11 and the end of Year 13 was well above the national average. The majority of minority ethnic students achieve in line with their peers. Retention rates are high. Students in the sixth form contribute well to the life of the school through charity work and the work of the specialist college.

The quality of the teaching is good, and focused, precise assessment helps students to make good progress.

A wide range and good variety of A-level courses are available, along with some vocational courses. The size and collaborative nature of the federation support this broad choice for students well. Students receive good advice on the appropriate course and as a result they are well matched to their programmes. A range of outside speakers help to develop students' broader knowledge, understanding and skills. The quality of care and guidance students receive from staff at Cotham as their home learning community is good. Fixed tutor periods are supplemented by extensive informal guidance from their personal tutors. Students value the way they are treated as adults by staff at the school.

Leaders and managers of the sixth form at the school set high expectations of both the staff and students, and they are tenacious in seeking alternative approaches to improve the life chances for young people. Their self-evaluation of provision is prompt and accurate and leads to targeted intervention to secure improvement. Target setting is challenging and students' progress is regularly reviewed by personal tutors.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire stated that they were happy with their child's experience at the school. The questionnaire return rate was below the average for secondary schools, and many who responded felt that they could not answer a number of questions because their children were at the very start of Year 7. However, a very small minority of parents and carers who responded to all questions expressed concern about how well the school promotes healthy lifestyles, and how well they were helped to support their child's learning. The inspection team followed up their concerns but found no evidence to support them during the inspection. Similarly, a very small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about the sixth form provision that were not supported by inspection evidence.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	62	55	46	41	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	46	37	64	57	3	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	32	54	48	7	6	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	36	53	47	7	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	36	32	62	55	3	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	25	63	56	10	9	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	26	64	57	13	12	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)	32	28	56	50	9	8	3	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	31	56	50	7	6	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	30	63	56	10	9	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	19	64	57	11	10	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	55	49	51	45	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	48	51	45	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' 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.



16 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Cotham School, Bristol BS6 6DT

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your school, which we judged to be outstanding.

We were impressed with the culture of your school, which encourages all students to excel, and also by your very positive attitudes to learning. Those attitudes, combined with the good teaching and excellent care you receive, ensure that you make outstanding progress by the time you leave the school. The school encourages all students, including those from minority groups, to achieve as well as they can. We agreed with you and your parents and carers that the school supported you particularly well when you joined in Year 7. The excellent curriculum provides you with a very broad and balanced range of opportunities and you also benefit greatly from the school specialisms. We felt that the performing arts in particular do a lot to help you grow in confidence and develop skills that prepare you for later in life. Cotham helps you to gain outstanding outcomes in the overwhelming majority of other aspects of your personal development. The school monitors how well you are doing very carefully and leaders are quick to put in support programmes for any of you who are falling behind.

We were impressed by the fact that although the school is already outstanding, it is ambitious to continue to improve, and senior leaders have a very clear picture of what needs to get better and how that needs to be achieved. We have asked the school to focus on improving teaching so that even more is outstanding. We have asked teachers to share ideas more and for those who observe teaching to make it very clear what teachers need to do better to help you make even more progress, such as ensuring that group work always caters fully for all ability groups.

You can help in this by continuing to demonstrate the belief you can all do well.

With very best wishes for your future happiness and success.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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