

Castle High School and Visual Arts College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103867
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	376983
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2012
Lead inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	797
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Marsh
Headteacher	Michelle King
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2008
School address	St James's Road Dudley DY1 3JE
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Age group	11-16
Inspection date(s)	18–19 January 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Michael Phipps

Additional inspector

Philip Winch

Additional inspector

David King

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed 35 teachers and lessons, of which seven were joint observations with the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with groups of students; members of the governing body; the school staff, including senior and middle managers; and a group of parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school development plan; minutes of the governing body meetings; documents relating to safeguarding students; and records of teaching. Inspectors analysed 97 parents' and carers' questionnaires in addition to those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

Castle High School and Visual Arts College is situated in the centre of Dudley. This is a smaller than average secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is twice the national average and an above average proportion of students speak English as an additional language. The number of students who are disabled or with special educational needs is also above average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. In 2010 the school met the government's floor targets. The school has achieved a number of awards including the Basic Quality Mark, Healthy Schools Award, Eco Schools Silver award, Dudley Food for Health platinum award and Investors in People. The current headteacher has been in post for two years.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school which is rapidly improving and closing the attainment gaps for all students in English and mathematics. This is a welcoming school which is at the heart of the local community. Parents and carers are very positive about the school and the time and support given to their child. One parent summed up the views of many commenting, 'You couldn't ask for more.' The school works relentlessly to encourage students to aspire to be the best they can. All groups of students make at least satisfactory progress. However, attainment is too low in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is good. School records and inspection evidence indicate that the proportion of good and better teaching in English and mathematics is improving because of the carefully targeted support and coaching provided by senior and middle leaders. However, this good practice is not yet a consistent feature of all teaching. Opportunities are missed to reshape the learning in lessons in order to address weaknesses in understanding and enable students to work independently.
- Students' attitudes to learning have greatly improved since the last inspection. These improvements can be seen in the increased rates of attendance, to just below the national average, and the reduction in disruptive behaviour. Consequently, behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Bullying and racist comments are now rare and dealt with promptly.
- The headteacher and her senior team have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use this information effectively to challenge and develop all staff and drive improvements in students' learning. Middle managers use data effectively to hold staff to account.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and increase rates of progress for all students in all subjects, especially in English and mathematics, through ensuring a greater consistency in:
 - using information from skilful questioning in lessons to reshape learning

- opportunities so that all students are able to progress to the next steps in learning
- increasing opportunities for students to effectively develop the skills to be independent learners.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

GCSE attainment is low for five A* to C grades including English and mathematics, but is steadily improving. This is because the school has implemented focused, well thought through support and interventions to help students improve their understanding and learning in lessons. Extra literacy classes are used satisfactorily to boost students' English skills. In addition, the identification of literacy opportunities across the curriculum is enabling students to improve their speaking and writing skills, particularly in their use of technical vocabulary. Improvements in mathematics have lagged behind those in English because the school has faced some recruitment difficulties within this department. This situation has now been successfully addressed. Students known to be eligible for free school meals, Pakistani students and those who are disabled or with special educational needs make similar progress to other groups of students nationally. The school uses tracking data effectively to pinpoint weaknesses in students' learning and provides carefully tailored support which is improving the quality of learning. Higher-attaining students are quickly identified and a range of successful initiatives, such as opportunities to work with a large car manufacturer, are used imaginatively to encourage and challenge. In addition, higher attaining students are successfully entered early for GCSE art in Year 9 and they can then take A level art in Key Stage 4. Parents and carers spoke very positively about how school had helped them to be successful and how much they had been supported into their next stage of learning at college.

In the lessons observed, all disabled students or those with special educational needs were well supported. Teaching assistants work closely with students, especially those who have emotional and behavioural needs, to ensure they understand what they have to do and are confident in answering questions. This helps to maintain their engagement in lessons.

Students work cooperatively and enjoy working in groups. Students report that they would welcome more opportunities to work collaboratively in lessons. Relationships between staff and students are good. Students report that staff are willing to listen to them and take account of their views. The majority of students enjoy lessons, especially when the learning is active. Students are gaining in confidence because they are experiencing success; they know their targets and are beginning to aspire to more challenging targets.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has greatly improved since the last inspection because the whole school culture has improved to meet challenging targets. Good teaching

practice is regularly identified and routinely shared. As a result, this has created a confidence in teachers in how to improve and develop their own practice. Teachers use a range of data to help them plan learning opportunities for different abilities and this helps all students make progress. Teachers have higher expectations of students' capabilities than at the time of the last inspection. Teachers encourage students to be more actively involved in their own learning, particularly in drama, dance and music and in group discussions in English lessons. In these lessons, teachers prepare students well to take a lead in their learning, and this approach encourages them to 'perform' confidently in front of their peers. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting lessons. For example, in a history lesson in Year 7, students discussed entertainment in the Middle Ages and compared it to entertainment today. This stimulated a great deal of discussion amongst students and enabled them to gain a better understanding of the period and also created a memorable experience. Teachers use a variety of assessment techniques to encourage students to assess their own learning. Consequently, students are increasingly confident in identifying how to improve their work. In a Year 11 art class, students worked confidently and independently; they could explain what they needed to do to improve their work from a merit to a distinction. But this good practice is not consistent in all lessons. Teachers are increasingly skilful in their questioning and encourage students to expand their answers. Where this is most successful, teachers amend their planning and address misconceptions in learning straight away. Evidence of this approach was seen in a design and technology lesson where the teacher questioned students and quickly identified and addressed gaps in their knowledge. However, in some lessons opportunities are missed to reshape the lesson to address weaknesses in knowledge and understanding.

The quality of marking has greatly improved. In the best examples where marking is most effective, teachers have developed a robust system for feedback. For example, in science smiley faces, coupled with a comment, are used to show how well students are meeting the learning objectives and explain areas for development. However, there is still some inconsistency in ensuring teachers' comments focus on what students need to do for their next steps in learning.

Recent curriculum developments have ensured that students who are disabled or with special educational needs receive an increased amount of in-class support across all subjects. This innovation, coupled with extra lessons and specialist teaching in English in Years 7 and 8, and additional specialist teacher to support students new to the country and for whom English is an additional language is having a positive impact on students' ability to speak, read and write in all subjects.

The school ensures there are plenty of opportunities to enhance students' understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their education. One boy typically said, 'This is a really multi-cultural school. The school values each individual for who he is'. The cultural provision of the school is a strength, particularly through the school's visual and performing arts curriculum. Every wall is used to celebrate the excellent art work of students. In Key stage 3, every child can learn a musical instrument. A 'picture of the day' has been introduced to generate thought and discussion in tutor periods and is supported by weekly themed activities. Assemblies and tutor periods are well used to encourage students to think about and discuss relevant issues.

Parents and carers are confident that their children are well taught and inspectors concur with this. Many parents praised the school and the impact of the new headteacher and the 'fabulous rapport' she has with students. Typical comments praise staff for doing 'everything within their power, and sometimes above and beyond', to ensure students are 'stretched and enabled to achieve their full potential'.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In the past poor behaviour was a feature of the school. Since the arrival of the new headteacher, expectations for behaviour have risen. Consequently, teachers now feel confident in tackling any behaviour which fails to meet the exacting standards expected by all. Occurrences of disruptive behaviour in lessons are increasingly rare and promptly addressed. Staff are well supported well by the senior leadership team and student progress managers, who are a visible presence throughout the school day. Senior leaders analyse behaviour logs to identify any patterns or students who may need extra support. Students report that they feel safe in school and that poor behaviour in lessons is dealt with quickly and consistently. A few parents and carers who responded to the questionnaires are still concerned about poor behaviour, but those who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the improvements in managing students' behaviour and were confident their children felt safe. There has been a significant drop in the number of fixed term exclusions. This means that students remain in school, follow their timetabled lessons and are smoothly integrated back into lessons. All students understand the expectations of the school and the simple classroom rules based on 'no ifs, no buts and no excuses'. In addition all staff have received training to develop their skills in effectively managing challenging behaviour. Bullying is rare and students are confident that any occurrences will be dealt with promptly.

The school takes a firm line to ensure that all students and staff are safe. Safeguarding training is up to date and all policies and procedures meet statutory requirements.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has high expectations for all staff and students. This is a school which continually strives to 'do even better'. The impact of this can be seen in the significant improvements in the number of students now gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in all subjects and the improvements in the quality of teaching. The headteacher took up post two years ago and has worked ceaselessly to improve the school. The senior team and staff structures have been redesigned. All staff are confident in her strong leadership and that of the senior team. The new structure ensures that all teachers meet the professional standards to lead learning. Regular six-weekly tracking data is shared with middle managers and all staff, and is used to hold all teachers to account for the quality of learning in their classroom. This data is used to inform the school development plan, staff professional development and to measure against performance management targets. For example, the impact of recent training and coaching on using assessment information was seen in lessons. As a result, teachers encourage students to self assess their own learning. Effective

monitoring of teaching and learning ensure that the senior leadership team, middle managers and the Governing Body have a secure view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the school is now in a strong position to improve further.

A review of the curriculum has enabled the school to improve the match of students' needs and interests and as a result has increased students' engagement in their own learning. The number of exclusions has reduced, and increased numbers of students are continuing into further education, particularly to study A-levels. The streamlined curriculum enables students to take exams early, retake where appropriate and in some cases extend the length of study. A greater range of qualifications are offered from entry level to levels 1, 2 and 3 and some AS level. Opportunities are provided to ensure that students understanding of the spiritual, moral, cultural and social aspects of the curriculum are strengthened so that mutual respect and tolerance are encouraged.

The Governing Body take an active role in supporting and challenging the school. Governors use their expertise to hold the school to account. Consequently, the school actively promotes equality, tackles discrimination effectively and ensures the gap in the performance of different groups is narrowing. The school ensures all health and safety processes and policies, including safeguarding are monitored and applied rigorously.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



20 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Castle High School and Visual Arts College, Dudley, DY1 3JE

Thank you for the warm welcome and courtesy you gave us during the inspection of your school. Your comments were helpful in giving us an accurate picture of your learning. Thank you to those students who completed the inspection questionnaire. It was very helpful to gather your views. We were impressed by how smart you looked in your uniforms and how well you behaved around school and in lessons. We are pleased that you feel safe in school and that bullying and disruptive behaviour in lessons is rare.

We found that you go to a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. We were very impressed with the quality of your art work on display and your musical accomplishments. You spoke very highly of your new headteacher and the positive difference she has made to the school. You value the time and support you receive from all the staff in the school. We agree with you that teaching is good and that the school is well led. It is clear to us that all the staff are working effectively to help you learn better and become more successful. This is seen in the improvements the school has made in the number of GCSE A* to C grades you achieve in all subjects and the improved results in English and mathematics. However, you still need to achieve higher grades in English and mathematics. We have asked the school to help you become more independent learners and to give you more opportunities in lessons to go through work which you do not understand. You need to continue to work hard and to ensure you attend school regularly so that you have no gaps in your learning.

We wish you continued success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

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