

Ernest Cookson School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104744
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	377121
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Linda Clare

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7–14
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Smith
Headteacher	Stephen Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. Nine lessons and parts of five options sessions were observed. Eight teachers, one unqualified teacher, a higher level teaching assistant and the learning mentor were seen. Meetings were held with students, representatives of the governing body, school staff, outreach staff and representatives from the local authority. The school's work was observed and the inspector looked at a wide range of documentation including data on students' progress, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, student progress files and the school's self- evaluation. Questionnaires were received from 20 parents and carers and the inspector also read responses from the students and the school staff.

Many aspects of the school's work were reviewed. The inspector looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well the school compares the learning of different groups of students to ensure all made sufficient progress.
- To what extent the school's strategies to improve student behaviour, attitudes and attendance are successful.
- How well the school manages equality of opportunity in all areas.
- Whether the leaders and managers of the school consistently promote improvement and effectively enable students to close gaps in their learning.

Information about the school

Ernest Cookson School provides for boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The students are mainly from Liverpool and the surrounding area. There are 17 students at Key Stage 2 and 33 students at Key Stage 3. All students have a statement of special educational needs. A very small number of students in Key Stage 3 follow alternative basic skills and vocational courses off site. The majority of boys are of White British origin. There is a small number of looked after students. The proportion of boys known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. The school has achieved the Quality Mark for Basic Skills Primary and Secondary Awards, Healthy Schools Award, Sports Activemark and Dyslexia Friendly School status.

As part of the Building Schools for the Future programme the school was relocated to its present site in September 2010. The new school building is co-located with a secondary mainstream school and shares the same site with a public library and leisure centre complex.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ernest Cookson is a good school which provides outstanding support and guidance for its students and successfully achieves its mission statement to 'provide a positive and purposeful school community with strong values and high standards of care'. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding and truly permeate everything the school does. Parents and carers appreciate the warm, caring ethos of the school and the personal attention their children receive. One parent commented, 'My son has made huge progress in his work and behaviour since starting there.'

The school's therapeutic culture, opportunities for reflection and systems to reward positive choice promote rapid progress in personal development. This better equips students to respond to the school's good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching and its effective curriculum. As a result, most students meet, and some exceed, targets which challenge them and their performance compares well against other groups with similar needs. From often very low starting points they make consistently good progress. Although attainment remains low for the majority, rapid gains are being made and attainment is rising quickly. Some students make outstanding gains and reach broadly age-appropriate levels by the time they leave in Year 9. Students with additional needs and/or disabilities also make good progress because teachers know their needs well and plan accordingly. Overall, students' achievement is good.

Behaviour around school and in lessons is good and contributes well to learning. Students say they feel very safe and secure in school. Membership of local sports and boxing clubs contributes to students' outstanding healthy lifestyles. At both key stages teaching is effectively underpinned by good classroom organisation and rigorously observed behaviour management systems. Opportunities for independent learning are limited and the school is aware that for a very few more-able students targets are not always challenging enough. The curriculum is flexible and enhanced by a range of alternative learning opportunities. There is insufficient curriculum continuity across most subjects between the key stages which slows progress for those changing phase. Pastoral and classroom support is sensitive and well-focused. Tracking systems monitor students' progress very effectively.

The headteacher and senior managers provide excellent direction and are committed to school improvement and to securing the highest standards. Analysis and evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and derived from thorough and systematic review procedures. Assessment data are used very effectively and school

development planning has very well identified priorities. Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's functioning and its strengths. Much has been achieved since the last inspection demonstrating the school's good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve student progress further by:
 - strengthening curriculum continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, especially in mathematics and science
 - increasing the level of challenge for more-able students.
- Promote greater independence for students as learners by:
 - introducing more levels of challenge in materials used in lessons to encourage more self-direction
 - decreasing student reliance on adults who support learning by focusing on the complexity of tasks rather than levels of adult input when planning work for different abilities
 - increasing opportunities for guided independent research and study.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students say they like school and enjoy their lessons. The majority are keen to learn and want to do well. They particularly enjoy practical and physical activities and show good levels of cooperation when working with others in their class. Many students enter the school with considerable gaps in their learning as a result of their social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, previous non-attendance or limited participation in education. The number with additional learning difficulties has risen in recent years and literacy skills on entry are particularly weak. As a result, the school has implemented a structured programme to enhance skills of literacy. This has significantly improved reading in all year groups but particularly at Key Stage 3, where, combined with greater maturity and improved motivation, it has resulted in tremendous gains – up to two years advancement - over the course of last year. At Key Stage 2, the majority of students make good progress in English and mathematics, with over half on track to achieve better than national progression guideline levels. Some individuals make even better progress. At Key Stage 3 the majority of students make good progress in English and mathematics. A smaller number make outstanding progress. Students of all ages make good progress in their social and emotional development. Students demonstrate good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and use specialist equipment in science and design technology safely. Students of minority ethnic heritage make good progress, as do those who are looked after by the local authority who achieve at the same or higher levels as their peers.

Relationships are good and students are confident that issues raised with staff will be speedily resolved. Students learn to manage their own behaviour more effectively as they progress through the school. Breaks and lunchtimes are calm and orderly and students are generally polite. They usually respond quickly to staff and show good consideration for one another. Students know their contributions to school are valued

and take pride in annually revising the school's Code of Conduct and serving as elected members on the school council. The good progress students make in key skills and ICT prepares them well for the future. Attendance is broadly average and is improving, albeit slowly. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students learn about beliefs, perspectives of others and the consequences of their actions. Drama has been used to aid student understanding of bullying, and Liverpool's cultural influence across the world has been examined. The end of year concert, a first performance for the school, was very well received.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

High staffing ratios and teaching that is at least good and sometimes outstanding are positive features of provision. Support staff have a key role in stabilising behaviour and supporting individuals. Expectations are high and planning is methodical, although too few worksheets are designed with more than one level of challenge. Learning objectives are clearly displayed and referred to frequently. Lessons are well structured and there is much use of praise and humour. However sometimes lessons are too difficult for some students to complete without needing to ask for help, or too easy and they finish quickly. Students' independence is not always fully promoted. Lesson content is chosen carefully to reflect the interests of the all-boy groups. For example, in an ICT project observed, the creation of a character called 'Renegade Hero' captured the group's interest as they designed rocket launchers and decided where to site 'Command Control' using correct ICT applications. Behaviour tracking reinforces individual targets well. The high levels of student engagement are rewarded by positive reinforcement and daily points which accumulate to allow access to the option choices at the end of each day. Learning and behaviour targets are both well displayed in books and on the walls of classrooms. Students are more confident in their behaviour targets but all know where to check for learning targets and what they need to do towards their next step in learning.

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

The broad, balanced curriculum is appropriately organised for the different ages of students. Cross-curricular provision is developing in ICT and literacy. The emphasis on literacy is reinforced through daily timetabled reading sessions, which contribute well to students' confidence as readers. The school has started to look at key stage continuity. Good progress is being made in English to streamline planning but this has not been implemented as extensively in other subjects, including in mathematics and science. There are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to work or study independently. Links with external organisations to provide a broad range of educational opportunities designed to appeal to more reluctant learners is a strength of the curriculum. Collaborations, part-time linked placements, inclusion opportunities and alternative education providers all contribute well. Placements are carefully monitored and regularly assessed by the school's staff. Residential and day trips, team building in North Wales and the Lake District, sports competitions such as tag rugby, tennis and football all enhance the school's curriculum offer.

Pastoral arrangements are very strong. Transition both into school and on leaving, at any age, is thorough and very effective. The extensive range of services, support workers and interventions are very well managed and offer outstanding provision. The timetabled quiet room, therapeutic hand and head massage, relaxation groups and circle times all very effectively support the school's ethos. Attendance is monitored closely and staff visit parents and carers at home regularly. The school has successfully established alternative and innovative ways to motivate and engage students who find traditional schooling difficult and attendance is improving.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides clear, calm and positive direction for the school and is ably supported by a very effective deputy headteacher and newly-appointed senior teacher. Together, they manage the key aspects of the school's functioning exceptionally well. Their keen expectations and a strong sense of purpose are shared by all staff and consequently, morale is high. The management of teaching and learning is good and is improving with the development of subject leader roles. Subject improvement plans make a good contribution to the development of teaching and learning. The partnership with the local authority to develop core skills is contributing significantly to this process. A thorough analysis of student progress aids effective target-setting which is well embedded. Members of the governing body maintain good contact with the school and their committee structure is being revised to strengthen their contribution.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding, supported effectively by therapeutic workshops, 'mum and son' sessions, home-school learning, mentor liaison and a range of information resources. Events for parents and carers

signposting additional support agencies contribute to very positive relationships. Safeguarding is outstanding. The arrangements for child protection are clear and well displayed. Risks are fully assessed and rigorous staff checks are in place. Collaborative work with external agencies to promote safeguarding and child protection is outstanding. The school takes great care to ensure equality of opportunity in all that it does. Every effort is made to close gaps in learning. 'Action for Progress' and 'Action for Recovery' plans illustrate this well, and are drawn up for particular students who need additional input to resolve an identified issue. Intervention for those with greater developmental delay provides for increasing numbers who have combined learning and behaviour difficulties. The school has recognised that there is not always enough challenge for more-able students. Good and developing partnerships promote music, enterprise and cultural activities including Generation 21, a project for secondary schools about a future Liverpool. The promotion of community cohesion is good and the school itself is a very cohesive community. Links with the local community, co-located and outreach partners, churches and multicultural learning provide students with experiences of life in a diverse society. Ernest Cookson School provides good value for money.

These are the grades for the 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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
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
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parent and carer responses to the Ofsted questionnaire are overwhelmingly positive. All indicate parents and carers feel students make good progress and the responses show strong support for the school's provision and leadership. Pastoral, support and guidance systems are particularly well regarded and overall, parents and carers are very happy with their child's experience at the school. These findings accord well with the inspector's findings that progress is good, behaviour, provision and management are good, and the care, guidance and support provided for pupils at the school are outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ernest Cookson 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 inspector received 20 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 50 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	40	11	55	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	50	10	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	10	50	10	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	50	9	45	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	55	8	40	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	40	8	40	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	50	6	30	1	5	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)	8	40	9	45	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	70	5	25	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	75	3	15	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	55	9	45	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	65	7	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	75	5	25	0	0	0	0

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 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



14 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ernest Cookson School, Liverpool, L13 0BQ

I am writing to thank you for helping me to come to judgements about your school when I visited last week. I have also read all of your views and those of your parents, carers and teachers.

You and your parents and carers think that Ernest Cookson is a good school and I agree with you. I was very impressed with how safe you feel and how much you do to keep healthy – there were people cycling, playing football or tennis at all times! All the adults in your school look after you extremely well. The extent to which they keep you safe and work with your parents and carers is outstanding.

Your school provides a good quality of education and you make good progress from when you first arrive. You say that you enjoy school and I am not surprised. This is because the teaching is good and your school has found a lot of partners to work with to make it even better and to help give you more choices in the future.

Your school is good because the headteacher and senior leaders are very good managers and are always looking to improve your education. I have asked them to:

- try to link the work you do in Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 a little more, especially in mathematics and science lessons, so that you do not slow down when you move to the next key stage
- look to see whether some of your targets need to be a little bit higher to improve your progress, especially for those who can do harder work
- give you more opportunities to see how much work you can do by yourself.

You could help your teachers by letting them know if you think that work is too hard or too easy for you and whether you could do it by yourself.

I am pleased that you have such a good school to go to. I hope that you take every advantage of the opportunities offered to you and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Linda Clare
Lead inspector

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