



Chosen Hill School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115763
LEA Gloucestershire
Inspection number 279673
Inspection dates 16 November 2005 to 17 November 2005
Reporting inspector David Humphries HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Brookfield Road
School category	Foundation		Churchdown
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL3 2PL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01452 713488
Number on roll	1388	Fax number	01452 714976
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr David McTeer
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Sue Turner

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Chosen Hill is a large, oversubscribed specialist technology school with nearly 1,400 students on roll, including around 240 in the sixth form. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The school is situated on the outskirts of Gloucester and recruits students from over 40 feeder primary schools spread across the surrounding area; very few are from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors judge that Chosen Hill is a good school with some outstanding features. This confirms the view held by senior managers and governors, because they have a clear sense of the school's overall strengths and areas for improvement and are committed to making the school more effective.

While the progress that students make varies between the key stages, overall it is good so that the standards they reach at age 16 are well above average. Teachers know their students well and are making increasingly effective use of assessment information to help them make greater progress. While teaching is good overall and is sometimes outstanding, it does not always build sufficiently well on students' prior learning in primary schools and sometimes lacks imagination and variety.

There is a very positive and productive atmosphere, underpinned by mutual respect and a common sense of purpose. The school is highly regarded by the great majority of students and parents. Behaviour is excellent and students respond well to opportunities to take initiative and responsibility. The school is an inclusive community; students feel safe and appreciate the ways in which they are supported by the school. A high quality curriculum meets students' needs and there are some striking examples of the school's specialist technology status being used in an innovative way to support teaching and learning.

Leadership and management are good; the headteacher is providing a strong and determined impetus to drive the school forward. There is good capacity for further improvement and the school provides good value for money. Senior managers know the school well, and recognise that there is scope for a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation with a sharper focus on judging the impact of changes and initiatives on students' achievement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges that its sixth form provision is good. Inspectors share this view because students' attainment in advanced level examinations is consistently above average and is outstanding in some subjects. Teaching is good overall and students receive excellent guidance and support. The curriculum is outstanding; enrichment activities prepare students well for independent life after school. Sixth formers make a valuable contribution to the life of the school, often providing very positive role models for younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- develop students' learning skills by extending the stimulating and imaginative practice which is evident in some areas more consistently across the school
- ensure that teaching builds more effectively on students' learning in primary schools so that students make greater progress in Key Stage 3
- develop a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation

with a sharper focus on the impact of changes and initiatives on students' achievement

- work with the local authority to improve cramped and sub-standard accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The overall attainment of students on entry to the school is above the national average. Students' overall progress through the school is good, but uneven. While the standards that they reach at age 14 are above average, students do not always make the maximum progress in Key Stage 3 because teaching does not consistently build on their achievements in primary schools. The school is aware of this and is working hard to address the issue; the most recent national test results show clear signs of improvement, particularly in English.

In Key Stage 4, good teaching and high expectations enable students to make more rapid progress so that their examination results at age 16 are well above the national average. This is carried forward to the sixth form where students' attainment in advanced level examinations is consistently above average; in some subjects results are outstanding, with most students achieving the highest grades. High levels of support enable students with a wide range of special educational needs to make good progress throughout the school.

There are some variations in how well students achieve in different subjects. However, senior managers analyse test and examination results carefully, are alert to any indications of under-performance and act promptly to address these.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students is outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent, reflecting the mutual respect, high expectations and very positive relationships which exist throughout the school. Attendance is good and a large number of students are eager to continue their education through to the sixth form. Students conduct themselves safely around the building and are polite to visitors, staff and each other. A wide range of opportunities in lessons and extra curricular activities and rich variety of international links enable students to develop strong spiritual, cultural and social awareness. Students show their concern for others through their charity work and the high levels of support they give to fellow students. A very strong understanding of moral values is evident throughout the school. Many students are actively involved in the daily running of the school, taking on responsibility with commitment and maturity. Students are eager to express their views through the school council and appreciate the school's willingness to act on what they say. For example, fresh drinking water is now more readily available throughout the school and healthier lunch options are now provided in the canteen. Students become strong and confident learners, who are well placed to continue their education or gain employment when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching is good. Most lessons are characterised by high expectations and productive relationships between teachers and students. In sixth form lessons, there is a relaxed, but hardworking, atmosphere and students gain confidence from the expertise and subject knowledge of their teachers.

Teachers manage their classes well, planning lessons carefully and making it clear what has to be learnt. They are making increasingly effective use of assessment information to inform their own teaching and to set learning targets for individual students. This is less well established in Key Stage 3, although teachers are now beginning to make better use of data from primary schools so that their teaching can build more effectively on students' earlier achievements.

Some teaching is outstanding, particularly when it is lively and sufficiently imaginative and challenging to arouse students' interest and enthusiasm. In some subjects, teaching and learning are enhanced by highly innovative use of technology. In contrast, when teaching is less stimulating, students can become overly dependent on their teachers. The school recognises this and is giving a high priority to developing students' independent learning skills; while this is at an early stage of development, it is beginning to have an impact in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

An outstanding curriculum, in both the main school and sixth form, provides students with extensive opportunities to achieve well. Extra literacy and numeracy classes improve the motivation and achievement of students with learning difficulties. At age 14, students are carefully guided into a series of academic and vocational pathways which are well designed to prepare them for the world of work or continuing education. An extensive personal, social and health education programme helps students develop very good citizenship and life skills. There is a rich programme of extra curricular clubs and activities, both sporting and cultural; these are well attended and very popular with students and parents.

The sixth form curriculum has impressive breadth; in addition to academic and vocational courses, students study philosophy and information and communication technology (ICT), and can buy into optional subjects such as Japanese.

The school uses its specialist technology status imaginatively and effectively to promote the highly innovative use of ICT in some curriculum areas and to foster international links. In partnership with a local independent school, video conferencing has been used to outstanding effect to facilitate joint sixth form religious studies conferences which have been addressed by philosophers of international standing. Sixth form

mathematics students benefit from a very well designed DVD incorporating teachers' explanations and model answers to past examination papers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes outstanding care of its students. Tutors and subject teachers monitor students' progress and well-being carefully; very effective communication ensures that concerns are identified and dealt with promptly. Students are encouraged to discuss personal problems or concerns and feel confident about approaching an adult or another student. Suitable child protection procedures are in place and staff are fully conversant with these.

Students with a wide range of special educational needs are extremely well supported; in-school provision is excellent and a range of external agencies provide additional specialist advice and guidance. Students who have experienced periods of serious illness speak very warmly of the ways in which the school helped them to keep up with their work. Students transfer to Chosen Hill from a very large number of primary schools, but an excellent induction programme helps them to settle in quickly so that they feel safe and valued. Students receive high quality guidance when choosing which subjects to study at age 14 and when moving to post-16 education or the world of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is dynamic and plays a pivotal role in driving forward changes and improvements. She is very well supported by a hardworking and effective senior leadership team. A commitment to sharing leadership across the school enables middle managers and others to lead key initiatives and play an active part in decision making. The views of parents and students are increasingly taken into account and acted upon. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school; nearly 500 questionnaires were completed for the inspection. The school has devised a range of strategies and initiatives to improve the quality of its work. Senior managers' judgements about the quality of teaching are generally accurate and there is a range of procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's wider effectiveness. Consequently, the school has a clear overview of its strengths and areas for improvement. Self-evaluation lacks some rigour because it does not focus sufficiently sharply on the impact of actions on the quality of teaching and learning and on students' achievement. Senior managers recognise the need for a more rigorous approach so that they are able to make confident and accurate judgements about the effectiveness of the many initiatives that are in place. They are strongly committed to taking the school forward and there is good capacity for further improvement.

The highly committed governing body is very supportive of the school, while also providing an appropriate level of challenge; for example, governors seek reports from middle managers in areas where improvements are needed.

The school is a safe and secure place, but in some areas teachers and students have to work in sub-standard and cramped accommodation.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Chosen Hill School Brookfield Road Churchdown Gloucester GL3 2PL

22 November 2005

Dear Students

As you know your school was inspected on 16 and 17 November 2005. Some of you met with inspectors and many of you will have seen us around the school. We are very grateful to you for telling us how you felt about the school because this helped us to make our judgements. Many of your parents/carers responded to a confidential questionnaire or talked to us and we also took their views and concerns into account when making judgements. We encourage you to read the report because it will let you know in more detail what your school does well and how you can help it to be even better than it is now.

Chosen Hill is a good school with some outstanding features. Students make good progress and achieve well in tests and examinations. There is a very positive atmosphere in the school. You behave very well and many of you show initiative and are eager to take on responsibility; this is a strength of the school. You are well cared for by teachers and other staff.

Your headteacher knows what the school does well and understands how to make it even better by looking more closely at how the standards you achieve are affected by changes and new initiatives in the school. She is well supported by a team of hardworking staff. Like you they are frustrated that some of the classrooms are cramped and outdated and they are doing their best to make improvements. You can continue to help them by looking after and making the most of what you do have, whether it is old or new.

In lessons, you make the most progress when teachers give you imaginative and challenging work that makes you think for yourselves. You can help them do this by responding positively when they try to involve you in the lesson or ask you to work in different ways.

Yours sincerely

David Humphries Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools